

An aerial photograph of a city in ruins. The foreground is covered in a vast field of rubble, including twisted metal, broken concrete, and debris. Numerous people are scattered throughout the scene, some standing in groups and others moving through the wreckage. In the background, the skeletal remains of buildings and structures are visible against a hazy, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is one of devastation and tragedy.

**Another 25
Testimonies
Against the Bible
#26 to #50**

Mohammad Mandurah

Another 25 Testimonies Against the Bible

#26 to #50

Mohammad Mandurah

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**In the Name of Allah,
The Most Merciful,
The Most Compassionate**

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Other Books by Mohammad Mandurah

- *25 Testimonies Against the Bible* (2020).
- *Biblical Creation vs. Qur'anic Creation* (2020).
- *The Morality and Ethics of the Bible and the Qur'an*, Updated and Revised Edition (2021).
- *InfoMiracles of the Noble Qur'an, Vol. 1*, Revised Edition (2022).
- *Qur'an's Message of Equality and Justice: Islam Responses to Racism and Bigotry* (2024).
- *From Dissent to Action: Jewish Opposition to Zionism and Its Aftermaths* (2024).

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I am particularly grateful to the contributors who shared their testimonies and perspectives, allowing for a diverse range of voices to be heard. Your courage in addressing difficult topics has made this book a vital resource for readers seeking to engage critically with biblical narratives.

Lastly, I wish to thank the readers who embark on this journey with us. Your willingness to explore these testimonies is essential for fostering understanding and dialogue in our communities.

Thank you all for your support and contributions. Together, may we continue to seek truth and justice in our exploration of faith and scripture.

Preface

In the landscape of biblical scholarship, the intersection of faith, history, and ethics presents a complex tapestry that invites both reverence and critical inquiry. As I embark on the journey of presenting "***Another 25 Testimonies Against the Bible: #26 to #50***," I am acutely aware of the pressing socio-political realities that shape our understanding of these ancient texts. This volume is born out of a desire to confront the uncomfortable truths embedded within the scriptures and to engage with the voices of those who have critically examined the Bible's narratives through various lenses.

The choice to compile these testimonies is not arbitrary. It is deeply influenced by the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the Occupied Territories, where biblical narratives have often been invoked to justify acts of violence and territorial claims. As we witness the profound suffering and displacement of countless individuals, it becomes imperative to interrogate how these sacred texts have been wielded in support of oppression and conflict. This book aims to contribute to a broader dialogue about justice, ethics, and the moral responsibilities that come with interpreting scripture.

Each of the scholars featured in this collection brings a unique perspective, illuminating the multifaceted ways in which the Bible has been understood and misused throughout history. Their works challenge us to confront the uncomfortable realities of violence, colonialism, and systemic injustice that are often embedded in biblical narratives. From the feminist critiques of Tribble and DeConick to the ethical examinations of Niditch and Seibert, these testimonies provide a rich tapestry of insights that compel us to rethink our engagement with the text.

In compiling these voices, I hope to foster a space for reflection and dialogue that transcends traditional boundaries. This book is intended for a diverse audience, including scholars, students, clergy, and laypersons. It is an invitation to engage critically with the scriptures, to question long-held beliefs, and to explore the implications of our interpretations in the contemporary world.

As we navigate the complexities of faith and scripture, we must remain vigilant against the dangers of dogmatism and exclusion. The testimonies presented here serve as a reminder that interpretation is an act of responsibility; one that can either perpetuate harm or promote understanding and healing. In the face of societal divisions and conflicts, the call for compassion, justice, and equity has never been more urgent.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the scholars whose works are represented in this volume, as well as to those who have supported me throughout this endeavor. Their insights and courage in addressing difficult topics inspire us to engage with the Bible in ways that honor its complexities while advocating for a more just and inclusive world.

As you embark on this journey through *“Another 25 Testimonies Against the Bible,”* I encourage you to approach the text with an open mind and a willing heart. May this exploration lead to deeper understanding, critical reflection, and a renewed commitment to justice in all its forms. Together, let us seek to illuminate the paths toward reconciliation and healing, guided by the lessons of the past and the hope for a more equitable future.

Mohammad M. Mandurah

October 2024

Introduction

In the ever-evolving discourse surrounding the Bible, the voices of critical scholarship have become increasingly vital. Following the foundation laid in my previous work, *“25 Testimonies Against the Bible,”*¹ this new volume, *“Another 25 Testimonies Against the Bible: #26 to #50,”* seeks to amplify and expand upon the critical examinations of biblical texts and their implications. This collection is not just a continuation; it is an invitation to delve deeper into the complexities and contradictions that permeate the scriptures.

The Bible, revered by millions as a sacred text, has also been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate. Its narratives have shaped cultures, influenced laws, and guided moral frameworks across centuries. Yet, as we peel back the layers of these ancient writings, we uncover a tapestry woven with threads of violence, oppression, and ethical dilemmas. This volume brings together the insights of 25 distinguished scholars, each of whom offers a unique lens through which to scrutinize the biblical narrative. Their contributions reflect a broad spectrum of critical thought, encompassing literary, historical, ethical, and feminist perspectives.

The choice of these particular testimonies is deeply motivated by the ongoing war against the Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied Territories. As we witness the devastating impact of conflict, displacement, and violence, it becomes imperative to interrogate the narratives that have historically justified such actions. Many biblical texts have been invoked to legitimize territorial claims and acts of aggression, often at the expense of marginalized communities. By engaging with these critical perspectives, we aim to shed light on how the scriptures have been used to rationalize oppression and warfare, prompting a necessary dialogue about justice, ethics, and the moral implications of scriptural interpretation in contemporary contexts.

From Niditch’s exploration of the ethics of violence in the Hebrew Bible to Nunpa’s review of how biblical interpretations were manipulated to justify the atrocities against the Native Americans, these testimonies collectively underscore the urgent need for a critical re-evaluation of the texts that have shaped Western thought and morality. Scholars like Rowlett and Prior challenge us to confront the violent rhetoric found in the biblical accounts of conquest and colonization, urging us to consider how these narratives have been employed to justify acts of aggression and domination throughout history.

The implications of these testimonies extend beyond academic circles; they resonate deeply in contemporary discussions about justice, ethics, and the interpretation of sacred texts. For instance, Daly and Haynes confront the troubling intersections of faith

and slavery, revealing how biblical texts were manipulated to support proslavery ideologies in the United States. Such historical analyses remind us that the Bible has been wielded not only as a source of spiritual guidance but also as a weapon in socio-political contexts, often with devastating consequences for marginalized communities.

Moreover, the critical examinations presented in this volume highlight the ongoing relevance of these issues today. As we grapple with questions of race, gender, and violence, the insights of scholars like Spong and Felder challenge us to confront the ways in which biblical narratives have been used to perpetuate systems of oppression. They invite us to reimagine a faith that is rooted in love, justice, and compassion, rather than one that upholds exclusion and violence.

As we progress through the summaries and conclusions of these significant works, we invite readers to engage with the critical perspectives offered herein. Each testimony is a call to reassess the narratives we inherit and the ideologies they perpetuate. By confronting these challenging themes, we can foster a deeper understanding of the Bible's role in society and its impact on our collective conscience.

This book is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital contribution to the ongoing dialogue about faith, ethics, and the interpretation of sacred texts. It encourages readers—whether scholars, theologians, or laypersons—to reflect critically on the narratives that have shaped their beliefs and the implications of those beliefs in the contemporary world. The testimonies herein serve as a reminder that the act of interpretation is not neutral; it is imbued with power and responsibility.

The testimonies in this volume are presented in chronological order according to their year of publication.

In this spirit of inquiry and reflection, I invite you to explore these testimonies, to question, and to engage with the profound complexities of the biblical text as we continue this critical journey together. May this volume inspire not only a deeper understanding of the Bible but also a commitment to justice, equity, and a more compassionate engagement with the world around us. As we navigate these challenging waters, let us remain open to the transformative potential of critical scholarship, recognizing that it is through questioning and dialogue that we may find new pathways toward understanding and healing.

Testimony #26: Trible - Texts of Terror (1984)

The Author: Phyllis Trible (born October 25, 1932) is a feminist biblical scholar from Richmond, Virginia, United States. Trible's scholarship focuses on the Hebrew Bible, and she is noted for her prominent influence on feminist biblical interpretation.²

The Book: "*Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*."³ The book presents a profound literary-feminist analysis of four biblical narratives that expose the suffering and victimization of women within the scriptures.

Key Narratives:

1. Hagar (Genesis 16; 21):

- **Context and Overview:** Hagar, an Egyptian slave, becomes a surrogate for Sarah, who is unable to bear children. The narrative illustrates the complexities of power, race, and gender.
- **Themes of Rejection and Exploitation:** Hagar is used as a means to fulfill Sarah's desire for children. Trible highlights how Hagar's identity is reduced to that of a mere instrument for procreation.
- **Resilience and Personhood:** Despite her mistreatment, Hagar emerges as a figure of strength. When she flees from Sarah's abuse, she encounters God in the wilderness, who acknowledges her suffering and promises her a future. Trible emphasizes that Hagar's personhood and dignity are crucial to understanding her story.
- **Contrast with Sarah:** Trible contrasts Hagar's plight with Sarah's privileged status, illustrating the intersection of race and gender. Sarah's actions, driven by jealousy and power, lead to Hagar's further victimization.

2. Tamar (2 Samuel 13):

- **Narrative of Rape and Betrayal:** Tamar, the daughter of King David, is raped by her half-brother Amnon. The story unfolds within the context of royal privilege and familial betrayal.
- **Power Dynamics:** Trible analyzes the power imbalance between Tamar and Amnon, emphasizing how Amnon's desire is framed as a form of entitlement. Tamar's pleas for mercy are ignored, showcasing the societal norms that condone male violence.

- **Silence and Isolation:** After the rape, Tamar is left to grapple with her trauma alone. Tribble critiques the male characters' reactions, particularly David's inaction, which reflects a broader societal failure to protect women.
- **Cultural Implications:** The narrative raises questions about the cultural context of honor and shame, particularly how Tamar's victimization reflects on her family and society.

3. The Concubine (Judges 19):

- **Brutality and Male Power:** This narrative depicts the horrific rape and murder of an unnamed concubine by a mob in Gibeah. It serves as a stark commentary on male violence and the systemic oppression of women.
- **Failure of Male Characters:** Tribble emphasizes the failure of the male characters to protect the concubine. The old man who offers her shelter ultimately betrays her, showcasing the complicity of men in perpetuating violence against women.
- **Narrative Structure:** The story's structure, with its focus on the actions and decisions of men, underscores the dehumanization of the female victim. Tribble calls attention to the way the narrative minimizes the concubine's suffering, reducing her to a mere plot device.
- **Cultural Reflection:** The story reflects a time of chaos and moral decay in Israel, highlighting the absence of justice and the normalization of violence against women.

4. Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11):

- **The Cost of Vows:** Jephthah's vow to sacrifice whatever comes out of his house upon his return from battle leads to the tragic fate of his daughter. The narrative explores themes of sacrifice, gender roles, and the consequences of rash promises.
- **Ambiguity and Tragedy:** Tribble discusses the ambiguity surrounding Jephthah's vow, questioning whether he intended to sacrifice an animal or a human. This ambiguity adds to the tragedy of the daughter's fate, as she becomes a victim of her father's unfaithfulness.
- **Courage and Agency:** Despite her impending doom, Jephthah's daughter displays courage and agency. She requests time to mourn her virginity, highlighting her awareness of the loss of her future and identity.
- **Patriarchal Structures:** The story critiques the patriarchal structures that allow for the sacrifice of women in the name of male honor and vows. Tribble

emphasizes the need to recognize the humanity of the daughter, who is often overlooked in favor of her father's narrative.

Themes:

- **Feminist Critique:** Tribble's analysis underscores the necessity of a feminist perspective in biblical interpretation. She argues that traditional readings often overlook the experiences and voices of women, perpetuating their marginalization.
- **Rhetorical Analysis:** By employing rhetorical criticism, Tribble reveals how language shapes meaning and perception in these narratives. She highlights the power dynamics at play and how they affect the portrayal of female characters.
- **The Role of Storytelling:** Tribble posits that storytelling is a powerful means of conveying truth and eliciting empathy. The narratives challenge readers to confront uncomfortable truths about violence and gender inequality.

Critique of the Bible:

1. Highlighting Gender Inequality

Tribble's analyses expose the systemic gender inequalities present in biblical texts. By focusing on stories of female suffering and victimization, she critiques the patriarchal structures that dominate these narratives, revealing how they reflect and perpetuate societal norms that marginalize women.

2. Questioning Moral Teachings

Tribble challenges the moral teachings derived from these narratives. She examines how the actions of male characters often go unpunished or are normalized, raising questions about the ethical implications of these stories. For example, the lack of accountability for figures like Amnon and Jephthah highlights a troubling moral landscape.

3. Reinterpreting Texts

By offering feminist reinterpretations, Tribble invites readers to reconsider traditional understandings of these biblical stories. Her approach suggests that the texts can perpetuate harmful ideologies, urging a critical examination of their moral teachings and implications for contemporary society.

4. Emphasizing the Voices of Women

Trible's work emphasizes the need to listen to the voices of women within the Bible, advocating for their recognition and dignity. This focus serves as a critique of the ways in which women's experiences have been historically silenced or ignored in both biblical interpretation and broader religious discourse.

5. Cultural Reflection

The narratives Tribble analyzes reflect broader cultural attitudes towards women and violence. By criticizing these texts, she highlights how they can be seen as reflections of the moral failings of their time, prompting readers to confront uncomfortable truths about gender and power dynamics in both ancient and modern contexts.

In summary, *Texts of Terror* serves as a critical examination of biblical narratives, questioning their teachings and moral implications. Tribble's feminist lens reveals the complexities and challenges of interpreting scripture, advocating for a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges the suffering of women and the ethical responsibilities of readers today.

Testimony #27: Niditch - War in the Hebrew Bible (1993)

The Author: Susan Niditch is a Samuel Green Professor of Religion at Amherst College. Her research and teaching interests include the study of ancient Israelite literature from the perspectives of the comparative and interdisciplinary fields of folklore and oral studies; biblical ethics with special interests in war, gender, and the body; the reception history of the Bible; and study of the rich symbolic media of biblical ritual texts.⁴

The Book: "*War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*."⁵ The book delves into the complex ethics of violence as portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures. It critically examines the various ideologies that underpin the narratives of war, exploring how these texts reflect and shape the cultural identity of ancient Israel.

Summary of Key Themes:

1. Ideologies of War:

- **Ban as Sacrifice:** The concept of *herem* (the ban) is central to Niditch's analysis. This ideology involves dedicating enemies to destruction as an offering to God, reflecting a belief that such annihilation is divinely mandated. The texts often present this act as a necessary means to secure God's favor and ensure victory. The ban is not merely about military conquest; it embodies a sacrificial framework where the lives taken in war are viewed as offerings to God, underscoring the gravity of the violence involved.
- **Ban as Justice:** In contrast to the sacrificial view, this perspective frames the ban as a mechanism for executing divine justice. The enemies targeted for destruction are portrayed as deserving of their fate due to their sins, idolatry, or moral corruption. This ideology emphasizes the need for purity within the Israelite community, suggesting that the destruction of these groups is essential for maintaining the covenantal relationship with God.

2. Bardic Tradition:

- The bardic narratives in the Hebrew Bible depict war as a heroic endeavor, often centered around individual combat and valor. These stories highlight the bravery of warriors and the importance of kinship ties. The narratives are rich with themes of honor and glory, presenting war as a noble pursuit where heroes emerge through their exploits. The emphasis on personal valor and

chivalric codes suggests a societal admiration for martial prowess and the ideals of heroism.

3. **Tricksterism:**

- Niditch explores narratives that feature trickster figures who achieve victory through cunning rather than direct confrontation. Examples include the stories of Jacob and Samson, where deception plays a crucial role. This approach often subverts traditional power dynamics, reflecting a marginalized perspective where the underdog uses cleverness to overcome stronger foes. The trickster's success is portrayed as a commentary on the nature of power and resistance, illustrating how marginalized groups navigate oppressive circumstances.

4. **Critique of Violence:**

- The book identifies moments within the biblical text that critique the brutality of war, particularly in the context of civil strife. For instance, the narratives surrounding the civil wars in Judges highlight the moral dilemmas faced by the Israelites when they turn against their kin. Niditch argues that these critiques reveal an underlying discomfort with the violence enacted in the name of justice or divine mandate, suggesting a complex relationship between the authors and the acts of violence they describe.

5. **Gender and War:**

- Niditch discusses the portrayal of women in war narratives, emphasizing their roles as catalysts for conflict. Women like Dinah and Jael are depicted in ways that intertwine their sexuality with the political and military struggles of men. The narratives often reflect societal attitudes toward gender, where women's victimization or abduction serves as justifications for violence. This dynamic reveals the ways in which gender and power intersect in the context of war, highlighting the limited agency afforded to women in these narratives.

6. **Pragmatism in Warfare:**

- The book also addresses the pragmatic aspects of warfare as reflected in certain biblical texts. Niditch points out that some narratives adopt a more utilitarian approach to war, where the ends justify the means. This perspective often leads to excessive violence and brutality, as seen in the conquests described in Joshua and the actions of leaders like Abimelech. The ideology of expediency suggests that military success is prioritized over ethical considerations, raising questions about the moral implications of such actions.

7. **Historical Context:**

- Niditch situates these war ideologies within the broader historical and cultural context of ancient Israel. She explores how the narratives were influenced by surrounding cultures, such as the Mesopotamian and Canaanite societies, and how they reflect the sociopolitical climate of the time. The book highlights the tensions between Israel's identity as a chosen people and the realities of living in a world filled with competing powers and ideologies.

Critique of the Bible:

Critical Examination of Violence

- **Ethics of Violence:** Niditch critically analyzes how the Hebrew Bible justifies violence, particularly through concepts like the ban (herem). By exploring these justifications, she raises questions about the moral implications of such teachings and their relevance to contemporary ethical discussions.

Tensions in the Texts

- **Contradictions and Critiques:** Throughout the book, Niditch highlights moments where the biblical texts themselves critique the brutality of war. This suggests an awareness of the moral complexities involved, indicating that the authors grappled with the implications of their narratives.

Gender and Power Dynamics

- **Portrayal of Women:** The examination of women's roles in war narratives reveals underlying misogyny and the use of violence as a means of control. By addressing these themes, Niditch critiques not only the portrayal of women but also the broader societal values reflected in the texts.

Historical Context

- **Cultural Influences:** Niditch situates the biblical narratives within their historical and cultural contexts, suggesting that the teachings on violence may have been influenced by surrounding cultures. This contextualization invites a critical view of the Bible as a product of its time, rather than a timeless moral guide.

Moral Ambiguity

- **Pragmatism vs. Ethics:** The pragmatic approach to warfare in some texts raises ethical concerns about the ends justifying the means. Niditch's exploration of this theme critiques the moral framework within which these narratives operate, questioning the righteousness of actions taken in the name of divine mandate.

Overall, while Niditch does not outright reject the value of the Hebrew Bible, her analysis invites readers to critically engage with its teachings on violence and morality. By highlighting the complexities, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas present in the texts, she encourages a nuanced understanding of the Bible's implications for contemporary moral discourse.

Testimony #28: Rowlett - Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence (1996)

The Author: Lori L. Rowlett is a religious studies educator and Assistant Professor at University Wisconsin, Eau Claire, since 1997.⁶

The Book: "*Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis*."⁷ The book examines the Book of Joshua through a New Historicist lens, focusing on how the rhetoric of violence within the text serves to construct identity and authority during a tumultuous historical period in ancient Israel. By analyzing the text's language and its socio-political context, Rowlett argues that Joshua is not merely a historical account but a complex ideological narrative that reflects and shapes the power dynamics of its time.

Summary of Key Themes:

1. Narrative of Identity:

- Rowlett posits that the Book of Joshua functions as a narrative that provides a sense of identity and cohesion among the Israelites, especially during periods of chaos and uncertainty. The text emphasizes self-definition, exploring themes of origin, destiny, and national unity. This narrative becomes particularly significant in times of upheaval, where a strong collective identity is crucial for societal stability.

2. Historical Context:

- The author argues that while the Book of Joshua claims to recount historical events from the conquest of Canaan, it was likely composed during the seventh century BCE, particularly in the context of King Josiah's reign. This period was marked by political and military challenges, and Rowlett suggests that the text reflects the anxieties and aspirations of a society grappling with its identity in the face of external threats.

3. Rhetoric of Warfare:

- The rhetoric of divine warfare is central to the text, serving as a means to assert power and encourage submission to a central authority. Rowlett emphasizes that the language of warfare in Joshua is not solely about physical conquest but also about ideological control. The text employs martial rhetoric

to create a narrative that legitimizes authority and calls for unity among the people.

4. **Methodology:**

- Rowlett utilizes Michel Foucault's theories on power relations and Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism to frame her analysis. She argues that texts are not just reflections of their historical contexts but are also active participants in shaping those contexts. The Book of Joshua, therefore, is seen as a tool for negotiating power dynamics, influencing the political environment of its time.

5. **Violence and Community Boundaries:**

- The rhetoric of violence in the Book of Joshua plays a crucial role in establishing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The text delineates insiders (the Israelites) from outsiders (the Canaanites), reinforcing the authority of leaders like Joshua and, by extension, King Josiah. This mechanism of defining community borders through violence underscores the ideological function of the narrative, where the punishment for Otherness is often death, thereby creating a clear dichotomy between the two groups.

6. **Comparative Analysis:**

- Rowlett engages in a comparative analysis of the language and themes found in Joshua with those in other ancient Near Eastern texts, particularly Assyrian, Hittite, and Egyptian literature. She highlights the similarities in the portrayal of divine intervention in warfare across these cultures, suggesting a shared understanding of warfare as a sacred act where divine will dictates the outcomes of human conflicts.

7. **Divine Intervention:**

- The text emphasizes the belief that military victories are attributed to divine will, often employing formulaic language that resonates with other ancient cultures. Rowlett asserts that this divine intervention is a common motif, illustrating how the Israelites understood their military successes as manifestations of Yahweh's power, paralleling the divine warriors of neighboring cultures.

8. **Cultural and Political Ideology:**

- The Book of Joshua is framed as a piece of propaganda for Josiah's reforms, aiming to consolidate political power and unify the nation under a singular religious and political identity. Rowlett argues that the conquest narratives serve to legitimize Josiah's authority by portraying him as a divinely appointed leader, thus reinforcing the connection between religious fidelity and political loyalty.

9. Role of Ritual:

- Rituals and public assemblies depicted in the text function as mechanisms for reinforcing communal identity and loyalty to central authority. Rowlett discusses how these rituals serve to merge military and religious duties, creating a narrative that emphasizes the collective responsibility of the Israelites to uphold Yahweh's commandments and support their leaders in the conquest.

Critique of the Bible:

1. Violence as a Central Theme:

- Rowlett analyzes the rhetoric of violence in the Book of Joshua, highlighting how the text justifies acts of conquest and destruction. This raises questions about the moral implications of divine commands that endorse violence against others, particularly the Canaanites.

2. Historical Context and Ideology:

- By situating the text within its historical context, Rowlett suggests that the Book of Joshua serves as a political tool aimed at consolidating power. This can be seen as a critique of how religious texts may be manipulated to serve specific ideological agendas, potentially undermining their moral authority.

3. Examination of Divine Authority:

- The portrayal of God as commanding violence challenges traditional notions of a benevolent deity. Rowlett's analysis prompts readers to consider the ethical implications of a faith that includes narratives of divine-sanctioned violence, questioning the morality of such teachings.

4. Insider vs. Outsider Dynamics:

- The text establishes clear boundaries between insiders (the Israelites) and outsiders (the Canaanites), often depicting the latter as deserving of violence. This raises moral concerns about exclusion, dehumanization, and the justification of violence against those deemed "other."

5. Narrative Function:

- Rowlett argues that the Book of Joshua functions not only as a historical narrative but also as a means of instilling loyalty and obedience among the Israelites. This critique highlights the potential for religious narratives to enforce conformity and suppress dissent, questioning the ethical implications of such control.

6. Cultural Reflection:

- The book reflects on how ancient Near Eastern cultures influenced the narrative, suggesting that the moral teachings of the Bible may not be unique but rather part of a broader cultural context that includes violence and power dynamics.

Overall, Rowlett's work invites critical reflection on the moral teachings of the Bible, particularly in relation to violence and authority. By examining the Book of Joshua through a New Historicist lens, she encourages readers to grapple with the complexities of biblical narratives and their implications for ethics and morality in both ancient and modern contexts.

Testimony #29: Prior - The Bible and Colonialism (1997)

The Author: Michael Prior, CM (15 March 1942 – 21 July 2004) was a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, professor of biblical theology at Saint Mary's College, University of Surrey, and a liberation theologian. He was an outspoken critic of Israel and of Zionism.⁸

The Book: "*The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*."⁹ The book critically examines the moral implications of biblical narratives concerning land, particularly how these texts have historically been used to justify colonialism and the oppression of indigenous peoples. It argues for a rigorous ethical evaluation of these narratives, emphasizing the need to confront their implications in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Biblical Land Traditions:

- The book delves into the biblical promise of land made to the Israelites, particularly focusing on texts from Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua. These narratives often depict God commanding the Israelites to conquer and exterminate the existing populations of Canaan, raising significant ethical concerns about the nature of divine sanction for violence.
- Prior highlights the complexity within these texts, noting that while they are seen as foundational to Jewish identity, they also present a troubling portrayal of God as a militaristic figure who endorses ethnic cleansing. This representation poses moral dilemmas for believers who view God as inherently good.

2. Colonial Appropriations:

- Prior explores how colonial powers, notably during the Spanish and Portuguese conquests in the Americas, invoked biblical texts to legitimize their actions against indigenous populations. The theological justification for colonization was often couched in terms of a divine mandate to spread Christianity, which, paradoxically, resulted in the oppression and extermination of native peoples.
- The book discusses the papal bulls and other religious endorsements that facilitated the colonial enterprise, illustrating how the intertwining of religious

authority and imperial ambition created a powerful narrative that justified violence and exploitation.

3. Afrikaner Nationalism:

- The rise of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa is examined in detail, revealing how biblical narratives were retroactively applied to support apartheid policies. The Afrikaners viewed themselves as a "chosen people," similar to the Israelites, which provided a moral framework for their claims to land and governance.
- Prior critiques the use of scripture by Afrikaner leaders to justify racial segregation and the systematic oppression of black South Africans. He highlights how theological arguments framed the indigenous population as "Canaanites" who needed to be subjugated for the sake of preserving the Afrikaner identity and culture.

4. Moral Critique:

- Prior argues that a moral evaluation of biblical texts is not only legitimate but necessary, especially given their historical use to justify acts of violence and oppression. He critiques the tendency among scholars to sidestep the ethical implications of these narratives, advocating for a more integrated approach that considers human rights and moral philosophy.
- He emphasizes that biblical scholarship should not operate in isolation from contemporary ethical standards, and that scholars have a responsibility to engage with the moral dimensions of the texts they study.

5. Contemporary Implications:

- The book addresses ongoing conflicts, particularly in Palestine, where biblical claims to land continue to shape modern political realities. Prior argues that the application of a literalist interpretation of biblical texts can lead to the justification of violence against Palestinian people, drawing parallels with historical colonial practices.
- He calls for a re-examination of how religious texts are interpreted and used, especially in light of contemporary issues of justice, equity, and human rights. Prior advocates for an interpretation of scripture that prioritizes compassion and justice over conquest and domination.

6. Liberation Theology:

- Prior discusses liberation theology as a response to the colonial and imperialist readings of the Bible. This theological perspective emphasizes the importance of reading scripture through the lens of the oppressed, advocating for a

hermeneutic that centers the experiences and voices of marginalized communities.

- He highlights how liberation theologians draw on the Exodus narrative as a paradigm for liberation, yet critiques their selective readings that often overlook the plight of indigenous peoples displaced by the Israelites in the biblical account.

Critique of the Bible:

1. Examination of Biblical Narratives:

- Prior critically analyzes specific biblical narratives, particularly those related to land and conquest, highlighting instances where these texts appear to endorse violence and oppression. This examination raises questions about the moral implications of such teachings.

2. Historical Context:

- The book contextualizes biblical teachings within the framework of colonialism, illustrating how these narratives have been historically appropriated to justify exploitation and violence against indigenous populations. This historical critique calls into question the ethical integrity of certain biblical interpretations.

3. Moral Implications:

- Prior emphasizes the need for a moral evaluation of biblical texts, arguing that many traditional interpretations have led to harmful consequences. By advocating for a reading that prioritizes justice and compassion, he challenges the notion that all biblical teachings are inherently moral.

4. Theological Justifications:

- The author critiques the theological justifications used by colonial powers and nationalist movements, suggesting that such justifications often distort the original intent of biblical texts. This critique questions the moral authority of those interpretations.

5. Call for Reinterpretation:

- Prior advocates for a reinterpretation of the Bible that aligns with contemporary moral values, particularly regarding human rights and social justice. This call for reinterpretation implies that traditional readings may be inadequate or even harmful.

6. Engagement with Liberation Theology:

- By engaging with liberation theology, Prior highlights alternative readings of the Bible that focus on the experiences of the oppressed. This approach critiques dominant interpretations and suggests that the Bible can be a source of empowerment rather than oppression.

Overall, Prior's work serves as a significant critique of the Bible, challenging readers to reconsider its teachings and their moral implications. By addressing the complexities and contradictions within biblical texts, he encourages a more nuanced understanding of scripture that seeks to promote justice and equity rather than perpetuate oppression.

Testimony #30: Daly - When Slavery was Called Freedom (2002)

The Author: John Patrick Daly is Associate Professor of History at SUNY Brockport. He has a Ph.D. in History from Rice University in 1993, and B.A. in Religious Studies/History from the University of Virginia in 1986.¹⁰

The Book: "*When Slavery was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War*."¹¹ The book delves into the complex interplay between biblical interpretation and the institution of slavery in America. It meticulously examines how the story of Noah and his sons, particularly the curse of Ham, has been historically appropriated to justify the enslavement of Black individuals.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Evangelical Culture:

- **Cultural Dominance:** Evangelicalism emerged as a dominant cultural force in the South, particularly after the Great Revival of 1801. It emphasized individual moral autonomy, personal conversion experiences, and a strong sense of personal responsibility.
- **Moral Framework:** This cultural movement provided a framework through which southerners interpreted their social and economic realities. The values of self-discipline, individualism, and moral self-governance became intertwined with the defense of slavery.

2. Proslavery Ideology:

- **Shift in Justification:** Before 1831, many southerners viewed slavery as a "necessary evil." However, following the abolitionist movements and significant events like Nat Turner's rebellion, there was a marked shift towards arguing that slavery was a "positive good."
- **Moral Defense:** Southern evangelicals developed a moral defense of slavery, claiming that good and virtuous slaveholders could fulfill their Christian obligations while owning slaves. They argued that slaveholding could be a means of moral uplift for both slaves and masters.

3. Response to Abolitionism:

- **Reinforcement of Identity:** The rise of abolitionism in the North served to reinforce southern evangelicals' sense of righteousness. They perceived abolitionists as threats to their way of life and responded by doubling down on their proslavery beliefs.
- **Biblical Justifications:** Evangelicals utilized biblical scripture to defend slavery, often citing passages that they interpreted as endorsing the institution. They positioned themselves as true Christians, in contrast to abolitionists whom they claimed distorted the Bible.

4. Cultural and Religious Justifications:

- **Scriptural Authority:** Proslavery arguments were heavily rooted in scripture, with ministers asserting that God sanctioned slavery. They pointed to examples from the Old Testament, where prominent biblical figures owned slaves, as a means of legitimizing their practices.
- **Moral Character of Slaveholders:** Southern evangelicals distinguished between the institution of slavery and the character of individual slaveholders. They believed that the moral integrity of the slaveholder could redeem the institution, framing slaveholding as a Christian duty rather than a sin.

5. Church Schisms:

- **Denominational Divisions:** The 1830s and 1840s saw significant schisms within major evangelical denominations, such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. These splits were largely driven by disagreements over slavery, with southern factions asserting their proslavery positions.
- **Consequences of Division:** The separation allowed for a more focused and unified proslavery message within the South, enabling ministers to preach and publish proslavery rhetoric without fear of northern opposition.

6. Racial Ideologies:

- **Constructing Racial Narratives:** Racism was deeply embedded in southern proslavery thought. Evangelicals often framed black individuals as morally inferior but capable of redemption through slavery. This narrative allowed them to justify the institution while simultaneously portraying themselves as benevolent guardians.

- **Christianizing Slavery:** The concept of a “Christianized” form of slavery emerged, suggesting that slaveholders had a moral obligation to care for and educate their slaves, reinforcing the idea that slavery was a necessary institution for both races.

7. Economic Arguments:

- **Linking Morality and Economy:** Evangelicals linked economic prosperity with moral character, arguing that slavery was essential for the South’s economic success. They believed that a thriving economy would ultimately lead to the uplift of enslaved individuals.
- **Providence and Progress:** Many proslavery advocates viewed the economic benefits of slavery as evidence of divine favor. They argued that God’s providence was evident in the South’s agricultural wealth and that slavery was integral to maintaining this prosperity.

8. Civil War and Post-War Reflections:

- **Theological Challenges:** The Civil War posed significant challenges to southern evangelicals, forcing them to reconcile their beliefs with the realities of defeat and the abolition of slavery. Many struggled to maintain their proslavery convictions in light of the war’s outcome.
- **Shift to Apocalyptic Religion:** After the war, many evangelicals turned to apocalyptic and prophetic interpretations of their faith, emphasizing a world beyond the material and a future where they could reclaim their moral and spiritual identity.
- **Enduring Legacy:** Despite the end of slavery, proslavery sentiments persisted in southern culture. Evangelicals continued to frame their beliefs in ways that justified racial and economic hierarchies, reflecting a broader cultural continuity that influenced American society long after the Civil War.

Critique of Biblical Interpretation:

1. Selective Interpretation:

- Daly highlights how southern evangelicals selectively interpreted biblical texts to support slavery, often ignoring broader biblical principles of justice, equality, and compassion. This raises questions about the integrity of their moral reasoning.

2. Moral Justification:

- The book critiques the moral framework that allowed individuals to reconcile their Christian beliefs with the institution of slavery. Daly examines how the moral teachings of Christianity were manipulated to justify an inherently exploitative system.

3. Cultural Context:

- Daly argues that the cultural context of the antebellum South shaped interpretations of scripture, suggesting that the socio-economic interests of slaveholders influenced their readings of the Bible. This challenges the notion of a universal moral authority in biblical teachings.

4. Contradictions in Evangelical Thought:

- The book points out contradictions within evangelical thought, where the same religious leaders who preached love and equality also defended slavery. This inconsistency serves as a critique of the moral coherence of their beliefs.

5. Impact on Modern Interpretations:

- By examining the historical use of the Bible to justify slavery, Daly invites readers to reflect on contemporary interpretations of scripture and the potential for similar misapplications of religious texts to justify modern injustices.

In summary, while Daly may not explicitly position the book as a blanket critique of the Bible itself, he certainly critiques the ways in which its teachings were used to support morally questionable practices, raising important questions about interpretation, context, and the ethical implications of religious beliefs.

Testimony #31: Haynes - Biblical Justification of American Slavery (2002)

The Author: **Stephen R. Haynes** is A. B. Curry Professor of Religious Studies and director of the Liberal Arts in Prison Program at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, where he has taught since 1989.¹²

The Book: "*Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*."¹³ It delves into the complex interplay between biblical interpretation and the institution of slavery in America. The book meticulously examines how the story of Noah and his sons, particularly the curse of Ham, has been historically appropriated to justify the enslavement of Black individuals.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Historical Context:** Haynes begins by situating the curse of Ham within the broader narrative of the Bible, specifically Genesis 9:20-27, where Noah, after becoming intoxicated, curses Canaan, the son of Ham. This biblical episode has been interpreted as a divine sanction for slavery, particularly during the antebellum period. Haynes traces how this interpretation evolved over centuries, reflecting changing social and cultural attitudes toward race and hierarchy.
2. **Interpretive Traditions:** The book explores the historical interpretations of the curse by both Jewish and Christian scholars. Haynes highlights that early Jewish interpretations often portrayed Ham in a negative light, associating him with various sins, including sexual immorality and disrespect toward his father. The Christian tradition, particularly among the church fathers, further entrenched this negative portrayal. Figures such as Augustine and Jerome contributed to the perception of Ham as a symbol of moral decay, while Shem and Japheth were depicted as virtuous, reinforcing a racial hierarchy that positioned Black individuals as inferior.
3. **Southern Proslavery Argument:** A significant portion of the book focuses on how Southern intellectuals and theologians adopted the curse of Ham as a cornerstone of their proslavery rhetoric. Haynes argues that the curse was used to frame slavery as a divinely ordained institution, suggesting that the subjugation of Black people was not only justified but also necessary for maintaining social order. This argument was often couched in the language of honor, with Ham's perceived dishonor serving as a rationale for the enslavement of his descendants.

4. **Themes of Honor and Order:** Haynes emphasizes that the Southern defense of slavery was deeply intertwined with cultural notions of honor. In the antebellum South, honor was a central value, particularly among white males. The narrative of Noah's curse was interpreted as a reflection of this value system, where Ham's actions were seen as a failure to uphold familial and societal honor. This dishonor was projected onto his descendants, framing them as inherently unworthy of freedom or respect.
5. **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The author employs a multidisciplinary methodology, integrating history, theology, literary criticism, and anthropology to analyze the implications of biblical texts on American society. This approach allows Haynes to dissect not only the texts themselves but also the cultural and social forces that shaped their interpretations. He argues that the misinterpretation and manipulation of these texts have had profound consequences for racial attitudes in America.
6. **Cultural Impact:** Haynes discusses how the interpretations of the curse of Ham have influenced American racial discourse throughout history. He illustrates how these readings have permeated various aspects of life, from literature and politics to social norms and religious practices. The book highlights the persistence of these interpretations in contemporary discussions about race, emphasizing the need for a critical reevaluation of how religious texts are utilized in societal contexts.
7. **Legacy and Modern Relevance:** The book concludes by reflecting on the lasting legacy of these interpretations and their implications for modern society. Haynes argues that the historical misuse of biblical texts to justify slavery continues to resonate today, affecting contemporary discussions about race, religion, and social justice. He calls for a responsible and nuanced understanding of biblical texts, urging readers to recognize the potential for both liberation and oppression within religious narratives.

Critique of the Bible:

1. **Historical Misinterpretation:** Haynes highlights how specific biblical passages, particularly the curse of Ham, have been historically misinterpreted to justify slavery and racial discrimination. This calls into question the moral authority of those interpretations and suggests that the Bible has been used to support oppressive ideologies.
2. **Cultural Context:** The book examines how cultural and societal biases have influenced biblical interpretations. By showing that these interpretations often reflect the prejudices of their time rather than the intended moral

teachings of the scripture, Haynes critiques the notion that biblical texts are inherently moral or just.

3. **Ethical Implications:** Haynes argues that the use of the Bible to justify slavery reflects a profound ethical failure among those who wielded it for such purposes. This raises questions about the moral integrity of using scripture to support inhumane practices, challenging the idea that the Bible is a straightforward guide to morality.
4. **Call for Responsible Interpretation:** The author advocates for a more nuanced and responsible approach to biblical interpretation, emphasizing the need to recognize how personal, cultural, and historical contexts shape understanding. This critique of traditional interpretations suggests that the Bible's teachings are not universally applicable without careful consideration of context.
5. **Reevaluation of Moral Teachings:** By exploring how biblical narratives have been used to perpetuate racial hierarchies, Haynes encourages readers to reevaluate the moral teachings derived from these texts. This inquiry invites a critical assessment of the ethical implications of scriptural authority in contemporary discussions about race and justice.
6. **Interdisciplinary Analysis:** Haynes employs various methodologies to dissect the intersection of race, religion, and morality, illustrating that the Bible cannot be divorced from its historical and cultural contexts. This interdisciplinary approach critiques any simplistic or literalist readings of scripture that ignore these complexities.

In summary, "*Noah's Curse*" serves as a profound critique of how biblical teachings have been historically manipulated to support oppressive social structures, particularly in the context of American slavery. While Haynes does not outright reject the Bible, he calls into question the moral integrity of interpretations that have been used to justify inhumane practices. His work invites readers to adopt a more critical and compassionate approach to biblical texts, recognizing their potential for both liberation and oppression. Through this lens, Haynes encourages a reevaluation of the ethical teachings derived from scripture, advocating for interpretations that foster understanding, justice, and reconciliation in contemporary society.

Testimony #32: Johnson - The Myth of Ham in American Christianity (2004)

The Author: **Sylvester A. Johnson** is Assistant Vice Provost for the Humanities and Director of the Center for Humanities at Virginia Tech, where he is Professor of Religion and Culture.¹⁴ His research examines religion, race, and empire; national security; and the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology on human identity.

The Book: "*The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God.*"¹⁵ It examines black and white Americans' recourse to the biblical character of Ham as a cultural strategy for explaining racial origins.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Hamitic Identity in Context:** Johnson delves into the origins and implications of the Hamitic myth, which suggests that Ham, one of Noah's sons, is the ancestor of African peoples. This narrative became a cornerstone for justifying racial hierarchies, particularly during the era of slavery in America. The portrayal of Ham as cursed led to the perception of Black individuals as inherently inferior and justified their subjugation. This myth was not merely a theological issue but was intertwined with social, political, and economic realities, shaping the lives of millions.
2. **Historical Perspectives:** The book traces the evolution of the Hamitic myth across different religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In early Jewish texts, Ham was not explicitly linked to racial inferiority; rather, narratives often focused on genealogical and land claims. However, with the rise of Christianity, especially in the context of American slavery, interpretations began to shift. Ham was increasingly associated with moral and cultural decay, positioning his descendants as the archetypal "heathens." This transformation highlights how religious narratives can be manipulated to serve racial ideologies.
3. **Racial and Religious Dynamics:** Johnson argues that American Christianity played a significant role in constructing racial identities through biblical narratives. The conflation of Blackness with heathenism created a complex identity crisis for African Americans. They found themselves in a dual position: as people of God through their Christian faith, yet simultaneously stigmatized as descendants of Ham. This internal conflict forced African Americans to navigate a landscape where

their religious identity was often at odds with societal perceptions of their racial identity.

4. **Black Responses:** The book emphasizes the responses of African American theologians and historians, such as George W. Williams and Edward Wilmot Blyden, who actively challenged the negative connotations associated with Hamitic identity. They sought to reclaim a sense of dignity and historical significance for Black people, emphasizing their contributions to civilization and their rightful place in history. Williams, for instance, published a comprehensive history of the Negro race, asserting that African Americans had a rich heritage that predated their enslavement.
5. **Christianization and Missionary Efforts:** Johnson highlights the role of Christian missions in shaping Black identity and the narrative of uplift. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, many African Americans viewed their conversion to Christianity as both a personal and collective means of empowerment. They believed that embracing Christianity would not only redeem their past but also allow them to lead their African brethren towards enlightenment and civilization. This missionary zeal was often accompanied by a paternalistic view of Africa and its peoples, reflecting the complex dynamics of race and religion.
6. **Theological Implications:** The author critiques the theological frameworks that have historically marginalized non-Christian identities. He argues that the narratives surrounding divine identity often perpetuate exclusion and dehumanization. By examining the implications of the Hamitic myth, Johnson calls for a reevaluation of how divine identity is constructed and understood, particularly in relation to marginalized groups. This critique extends to contemporary religious practices and beliefs, urging a more inclusive understanding of divinity that recognizes the humanity of all individuals, regardless of their racial or religious background.
7. **Contemporary Relevance:** The book concludes by connecting historical narratives to modern issues of race, identity, and religious discourse. Johnson emphasizes that the legacy of the Hamitic myth continues to influence contemporary perceptions of race and religion. He urges readers to critically examine how divine identity is constructed today and how it impacts marginalized communities. By addressing the complexities of identity formation and the historical injustices rooted in religious narratives, Johnson advocates for a more equitable and just understanding of humanity that transcends racial and religious boundaries.

Critique of the Bible:

1. **Interpretation of Scripture:** Johnson examines how the biblical story of Ham has been misinterpreted and manipulated to justify racial hierarchies and the oppression of Black individuals. This critique highlights the dangers of selective biblical interpretation that can lead to moral and ethical contradictions.
2. **Moral Implications:** The book addresses the moral consequences of using biblical narratives to justify slavery and racial discrimination. Johnson challenges the ethical foundations of these interpretations, questioning how a text that is often viewed as divinely inspired can be used to perpetuate injustice.
3. **Historical Context:** By placing the Hamitic myth within its historical context, Johnson critiques the ways in which religious institutions have contributed to systemic racism. He argues that the church's complicity in these narratives raises significant moral questions about the teachings of Christianity.
4. **Theological Frameworks:** Johnson critiques the theological frameworks that have historically marginalized non-Christian identities and reinforced racial stereotypes. He calls for a reevaluation of these frameworks, suggesting that they often fail to align with the core teachings of love, equality, and justice found in Christian doctrine.
5. **Contemporary Relevance:** The book encourages readers to critically engage with biblical texts and their interpretations in light of modern ethical standards. Johnson's analysis serves as a reminder that religious teachings must be continually examined and reinterpreted to uphold justice and equity.

In summary, *"The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity"* provides a robust critique of the Bible, its teachings, and their moral implications. By examining the historical misuse of biblical narratives to justify racism, Johnson invites readers to engage in a critical reassessment of scripture and its interpretations. His work not only highlights the ethical dilemmas inherent in these interpretations but also advocates for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of faith that honors the dignity of all individuals.

Testimony #33: Spong - The Sins of Scripture (2005)

The Author: John Shelby Spong (June 16, 1931 – September 12, 2021) was an American bishop of the Episcopal Church, born in Charlotte, North Carolina. He served as the Bishop of Newark, New Jersey from 1979 to 2000. Spong was a liberal Christian theologian, religion commentator, and author who called for a fundamental rethinking of Christian belief away from theism and traditional doctrines.¹⁶

The Book: "*The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love*."¹⁷ The book is a critical examination of how scripture has been misused to justify various forms of oppression. Spong's insights encourage readers to engage with biblical texts thoughtfully and compassionately, promoting a vision of faith that is inclusive and affirming of all people.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Purpose of the Book:** Spong's primary aim is to expose and critique the harmful texts within the Bible that have historically been used to justify acts of hate, violence, and discrimination. He seeks to uncover a more loving and inclusive understanding of God, contrasting the traditional interpretations that have led to division and suffering.
2. **Interpretation of Scripture:** The author emphasizes that the Bible is a complex text open to various interpretations. Throughout history, different groups—including religious leaders, political powers, and cultural movements—have used biblical texts to support their own agendas. This misuse has often resulted in violence, oppression, and the marginalization of certain groups. Spong argues for a more nuanced and critical approach to scripture that recognizes its historical context and the evolution of its interpretations.
3. **Environmental Ethics:** Spong discusses the ethical implications of biblical injunctions such as "be fruitful and multiply." He links this command to the current environmental crisis, arguing that overpopulation and unchecked reproduction have led to significant ecological degradation. He advocates for responsible family planning and birth control as moral imperatives in light of contemporary challenges, urging a reevaluation of how these biblical texts are applied in modern society.
4. **Role of Women:** A significant portion of the book critiques the portrayal of women in scripture. Spong highlights how biblical texts have perpetuated sexism and misogyny, often depicting women as subordinate to men. He examines specific

narratives, such as the creation story of Adam and Eve, to illustrate how these texts have been used to justify patriarchal structures within both religious and societal contexts. Spong calls for a reexamination of these narratives to promote gender equality and to recognize the full humanity and agency of women.

5. **Homosexuality:** Spong addresses the Church's historical opposition to homosexuality, arguing that many biblical texts have been misinterpreted or taken out of context to support homophobic attitudes. He contends that the Bible has been used to justify discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, and he advocates for their acceptance and inclusion within religious communities. Spong emphasizes the importance of love and compassion over rigid interpretations of scripture.
6. **Anti-Semitism:** The author explores the roots of Christian anti-Semitism found in biblical texts, particularly those that have historically been used to vilify Jewish people. He urges Christians to confront this legacy and seek reconciliation with the Jewish community. Spong advocates for interfaith dialogue as a means to foster understanding and healing, recognizing the shared heritage between Judaism and Christianity.
7. **Certainty and Dogma:** Spong critiques the rigid certainty and dogmatism often found in religious beliefs, suggesting that these attitudes contribute to intolerance and conflict. He argues that insistence on absolute truths can lead to a lack of compassion and an unwillingness to engage with differing perspectives. Instead, he calls for a more open and questioning approach to faith, encouraging believers to embrace doubt and uncertainty as part of their spiritual journey.
8. **Reading the Bible as Epic History:** Spong encourages readers to view the Bible not as a literal historical account but as a collection of epic narratives that reflect the human experience. He asserts that these stories were shaped by the cultural and historical contexts in which they were written. By understanding the Bible as an epic, readers can appreciate its literary and theological richness while recognizing the limitations of literal interpretations.
9. **Vision for the Future:** Spong envisions a future where different faith traditions can engage in meaningful dialogue, embracing diversity and recognizing the shared humanity among all people. He believes that interfaith cooperation can lead to a more just and compassionate world. This vision includes a call for Christians to move beyond exclusivist claims about salvation and to acknowledge the validity of other religious paths.

Critique of the Bible:

1. **Examination of Harmful Texts:** Spong systematically analyzes specific biblical passages that have been used to justify hate, discrimination, and violence. He critiques how these texts have been interpreted and applied throughout history.
2. **Questioning Traditional Interpretations:** The book challenges traditional interpretations of scripture, particularly those that uphold patriarchal values, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. Spong argues that many of these interpretations are outdated and harmful.
3. **Call for Contextual Understanding:** Spong emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context in which biblical texts were written. He critiques literal readings of scripture that ignore these contexts, advocating for a more nuanced approach.
4. **Focus on Ethical Implications:** By linking biblical teachings to contemporary issues such as environmental ethics, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights, Spong critiques the ethical implications of certain biblical doctrines and their impact on society.
5. **Advocacy for Reform:** The book serves as a call for reform within Christianity, urging believers to move away from harmful doctrines and embrace a more inclusive and loving interpretation of faith.
6. **Rejection of Dogmatism:** Spong critiques the dogmatic certainty that often accompanies religious belief, arguing that such attitudes can lead to intolerance and division.

Overall, "*The Sins of Scripture*" serves as a profound critique of the Bible and its teachings, encouraging readers to reflect on the implications of scripture and to seek a more loving and inclusive understanding of their faith. Spong's insights challenge traditional beliefs and advocate for a reformed Christianity that aligns with contemporary ethical standards and promotes social justice.

Testimony #34: Whitford - The Curse of Ham and the Justification for Slavery (2009)

The Author: David M. Whitford is Professor of Reformation Studies at Baylor University, Texas. As a cultural historian, his interest is in the intersection of religion and society during the European Reformations of the sixteenth century. He is an editor of *The Sixteenth Century Journal*.¹⁸

The Book: "*The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery*."¹⁹ The book is a critical examination of the intersection of biblical interpretation, race, and slavery. By tracing the historical misinterpretation of the Curse of Ham, the Author reveals how a single biblical narrative became a powerful tool for justifying racial oppression and slavery.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Introduction to the Curse of Ham:** The book opens with an exploration of the biblical narrative found in Genesis 9, where Noah curses Canaan, the son of Ham, after Ham sees his father naked. Whitford discusses how this curse has been historically misinterpreted, particularly in the context of slavery. He emphasizes that while the text does not explicitly curse Ham, later interpretations conflated Ham's identity with that of Canaan, leading to the erroneous belief that all of Ham's descendants were cursed.
2. **Historical Context and Misinterpretation:** Whitford situates the curse within the broader socio-political landscape of the early modern period, particularly during the rise of transatlantic slavery. He argues that the curse was co-opted by proponents of slavery to justify the subjugation of African peoples. This misinterpretation was particularly prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries, a time when biblical texts were often used to support existing social hierarchies and racial discrimination.
3. **Exegetical Traditions and Evolving Interpretations:** The author delves into the exegetical history of Genesis 9, revealing how various theologians and scholars approached the text over the centuries. He notes that early modern interpreters often ignored the complexities of the original Hebrew and instead adopted a simplistic reading that emphasized racial differences. This led to a widespread belief that blackness was synonymous with servitude and inferiority, which was further entrenched by the socio-political climate of the time.

4. **Annius of Viterbo and Fabricated Histories:** A significant portion of the book is dedicated to Annius of Viterbo, who produced an influential but fraudulent history connecting Ham to various ancient civilizations, including Egypt. Whitford explains how Annius's work, published in the late 15th century, sought to legitimize papal claims to nobility and power by fabricating genealogies that linked key historical figures to Noah. Annius portrayed Ham as a pivotal figure in the lineage of kings and gods, effectively transforming him from a biblical character into a symbol of both nobility and moral decay.²⁰
5. **Cultural Impact on Literature and Art:** The book discusses how the Curse of Ham permeated various cultural expressions, including literature, art, and theological discourse. Whitford illustrates how writers and artists of the period depicted Ham and his descendants in ways that reinforced stereotypes of Africans as hypersexual and morally corrupt. This portrayal was not only a reflection of contemporary racial attitudes but also served to justify the economic exploitation of enslaved individuals.
6. **Racial Justifications for Slavery:** Whitford analyzes how the narrative of the curse contributed to the development of racial theories that portrayed blackness as a divine punishment. He highlights the works of several key figures who popularized these ideas, effectively linking the curse to the notion of racial inferiority. The author argues that this linkage was not merely a theological oversight but a deliberate attempt to create a moral justification for the institution of slavery.
7. **Emergence of Critiques Against Slavery:** The narrative shifts to the voices of dissent against the use of the Curse of Ham to justify slavery. Figures like Morgan Godwyn emerged in the 17th century, advocating for the evangelization of enslaved Africans rather than their oppression. Whitford emphasizes Godwyn's critique of the curse and how he sought to reframe the conversation around slavery, arguing that it was a moral imperative to convert enslaved individuals to Christianity rather than condemn them based on a misinterpretation of biblical texts.
8. **Legacy and Continuing Implications:** In the concluding chapters, Whitford reflects on the enduring legacy of the Curse of Ham and its interpretations. He discusses how these ideas have persisted in modern times, influencing contemporary racial attitudes and justifications for inequality. The book calls for a reevaluation of these interpretations, urging readers to recognize the historical consequences of misreading biblical texts and the role they played in perpetuating systemic racism.

Critique of the Bible:

1. **Misinterpretation of Scripture:** Whitford highlights how the biblical narrative of the Curse of Ham has been misinterpreted over centuries, leading to justifications for slavery and racial discrimination. This suggests a critique of how scripture can be manipulated to support immoral practices.
2. **Historical Context of Abuse:** The book examines the historical misuse of biblical texts by theologians and scholars to legitimize slavery. This indicates a critique not only of the interpretations but also of the broader theological frameworks that allowed such abuses to persist.
3. **Moral Implications:** By revealing the ways in which the curse was used to justify the oppression of entire races, Whitford questions the moral authority of those interpretations. He challenges readers to reconsider the ethical implications of using religious texts to justify inhumane practices.
4. **Call for Reevaluation:** Whitford advocates for a reevaluation of biblical interpretations, suggesting that a more nuanced understanding could lead to more ethical applications of scripture. This reflects a critical stance on the prevailing teachings that have historically caused harm.
5. **Engagement with Dissenting Voices:** The book discusses figures who opposed the use of the curse to justify slavery, highlighting a moral counter-narrative within the Christian tradition. This engagement suggests that not all interpretations of the Bible align with ethical principles, pointing to the need for discernment in theological discourse.

In summary, David M. Whitford's *"The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era"* serves as a significant critique of the Bible, its teachings, and the morality derived from its interpretations. By examining the historical misinterpretations of the Curse of Ham, the book reveals how scripture can be manipulated to justify unethical practices such as slavery. Whitford calls for a more nuanced and responsible engagement with biblical texts, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in theological discourse. His work not only critiques past interpretations but also challenges contemporary faith communities to reflect on their teachings and their implications for justice and equality in today's society.

Testimony #35: Davies - The Immoral Bible (2010)

The Author: Eryl W. Davies is an Emeritus Professor of History, Law and Social Sciences at Bangor University and an expert on biblical criticism and ethics. He has a PhD in Old Testament Studies from the University of Cambridge and has published several books and articles on topics such as Numbers, Calvinism, Afro-American religions, and intergenerational trauma.²¹

The Book: *"The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics."* The book is a critical examination of the ethically problematic passages of the Hebrew Bible, such as the ones that depict violence, warfare, genocide, slavery, rape, and other moral issues.²²

Key Points and Themes:

1. **Ethically Problematic Passages:** The book examines morally troubling texts in the Hebrew Bible, particularly those that advocate violence, genocide, and practices like slavery and polygamy.
2. **Strategies for Interpretation:**
 - **Evolutionary Approach:** This historical-critical method suggests that biblical ethics evolved over time, moving from primitive to more advanced moral principles. Critics argue this approach can lead to a negative view of the Hebrew Bible.
 - **Cultural Relativism:** This view posits that biblical texts should be understood within their historical and cultural contexts, arguing that ancient customs cannot be judged by modern standards. However, it risks making the Bible seem irrelevant today.
 - **Canon within the Canon:** This method involves selecting certain biblical texts that are seen as more relevant or moral, while sidelining those that are problematic. Critics point out that this can lead to subjective interpretations and a lack of engagement with the entirety of Scripture.
 - **Canonical Approach:** Advocated by Brevard Childs, this method emphasizes reading the Bible as a whole, ensuring that ethical reflections consider the entire canon rather than isolated texts.
 - **Paradigmatic Approach:** This approach seeks to derive underlying moral principles from biblical texts to apply to contemporary issues, but it can be criticized for being overly subjective and potentially distorting the original text's meaning.

- **Reader-Response Criticism:** This method encourages readers to actively engage with the text, questioning its moral implications and rejecting oppressive or unjust claims. It emphasizes the importance of ethical critique in biblical scholarship.
3. **Conquest Narratives:** The book highlights the ethical dilemmas surrounding the conquest of Canaan, where Israel is commanded to annihilate entire populations. These narratives raise significant moral questions about divine command and human responsibility.
 4. **Moral Critique:** The author advocates for a robust ethical critique of the Hebrew Bible, arguing that scholars should not shy away from questioning the morality of biblical texts, as doing so is essential for meaningful interpretation.
 5. **Contemporary Relevance:** Despite the cultural and historical distance, the book argues that the Hebrew Bible can still offer valuable ethical insights today, provided readers engage with it critically and thoughtfully.

Critique of Biblical Teachings and Morality:

1. **Examination of Morally Problematic Texts:** The book focuses on passages in the Hebrew Bible that present ethical dilemmas, such as those endorsing violence, genocide, and slavery. By highlighting these issues, Davies critiques the moral implications of these texts and questions their relevance to contemporary ethical standards.
2. **Questioning Divine Command:** Davies raises critical questions about how a benevolent God can command actions that appear morally reprehensible, such as the annihilation of populations during the conquest of Canaan. This challenges traditional views of divine morality and authority.
3. **Engagement with Interpretative Strategies:** The author critiques various approaches to interpreting the Bible, particularly those that seek to minimize or rationalize the ethically troubling aspects. By advocating for critical engagement with Scripture, he encourages readers to confront rather than ignore these moral complexities.
4. **Historical Context vs. Contemporary Relevance:** While acknowledging the historical context of biblical texts, Davies critiques the tendency to view them as irrelevant to modern ethical discussions. He argues for a more nuanced understanding that recognizes both the historical and contemporary implications of these teachings.
5. **Call for Ethical Reflection:** The book emphasizes the need for ethical reflection on how biblical texts have been used to justify harmful practices throughout history.

This critique extends to the ways in which Scripture has been employed in modern contexts to support discrimination and violence.

In summary, Eryl W. Davies's "*The Immoral Bible*" can be seen as a profound critique of the Bible and its teachings regarding morality. By examining ethically problematic passages, questioning the nature of divine commands, and engaging with various interpretative strategies, Davies challenges traditional understandings of Scripture. His work calls for critical reflection on the moral implications of biblical texts, urging readers to confront the complexities of the Hebrew Bible while recognizing its potential to inform and shape modern ethical discussions. Ultimately, the book advocates for a responsible and reflective approach to interpreting Scripture, one that acknowledges its historical context while also engaging with its relevance to contemporary moral issues.

Testimony #36: Earl - The Joshua Delusion (2010)

The Author: Douglas S. Earl did his PhD on the book of Joshua at the University of Durham. He is author of *Reading Joshua* as Christian Scripture.²³

The Book: "*The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible*."²⁴ In this bold and innovative book Douglas Earl guides the readers to new and unexpected ways of looking at the book of Joshua. Drawing on insights from the early church and from modern scholarship, Earl argues that we have mistakenly read Joshua as a straightforward historical account and have ended up with a genocidal God. In contrast, Earl offers a theological interpretation in which the mass killing of Canaanites is a deliberate use of myth to make important theological points that are still valid today.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Historical Context and Interpretation

Earl challenges the traditional understanding of the Book of Joshua as a straightforward historical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. He argues that the narratives are not merely historical records but serve deeper theological and ethical purposes. The book emerges from a complex interplay of ancient traditions and modern interpretations, suggesting that readers must consider the broader implications of the text rather than focusing solely on its historical accuracy.

2. The Concept of *Herem*

A central theme in the book is the term "*herem*," which refers to the total destruction commanded by God in the context of warfare. Earl suggests that *herem* should be understood not as a literal call for violence but as a symbolic act representing divine judgment and loyalty. The narratives surrounding *herem* serve as a test of faithfulness to God, prompting readers to reconsider their understanding of divine commands and the ethical implications of obedience.

3. Character Studies

Earl uses the contrasting stories of Rahab and Achan to illustrate the complexities of identity within the narratives. Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, aids the Israelite spies and ultimately embodies faithfulness, resulting in her acceptance into the Israelite community. In stark contrast, Achan, an Israelite, disobeys God by taking forbidden spoils from Jericho, leading to his tragic downfall. These character studies challenge the

reader to reflect on the true nature of faithfulness and obedience, suggesting that identity is not solely determined by ethnicity or heritage but by one's actions and responses to God.

4. Symbolism Over Literalism

Earl emphasizes the importance of reading the narratives symbolically rather than literally. He argues that the stories should evoke reflections on faith and identity rather than serve as historical documentation of violence. By focusing on the symbolic meanings behind the narratives, readers can explore how these stories challenge the boundaries of who is considered an insider or outsider within the community of faith. This symbolic interpretation allows for a richer understanding of the text's implications for contemporary readers.

5. Covenantal Relationship

The book explores how the land and the concept of *herem* symbolize the covenantal relationship between Israel and God. The Promised Land is not just a geographical space; it represents the blessings associated with living in a faithful relationship with Yahweh. Earl argues that the narratives reflect the nature of this relationship, urging readers to consider how their responses to God shape their identity as part of the community of faith.

6. Ethical Implications

Earl strongly asserts that the portrayal of violence in Joshua should not be used to justify contemporary acts of violence or genocide. Instead, the text serves as a call for introspection about how individuals and communities respond to God and others. The narratives encourage readers to embody values such as love, justice, and mercy, emphasizing that true faithfulness involves ethical considerations that transcend historical or cultural contexts.

7. Christian Interpretation

The book discusses how Joshua can be understood within the Christian tradition, particularly in light of New Testament teachings. Earl encourages readers to view the narratives as invitations to live out their faith in ways that reflect the core tenets of Christianity. By connecting the themes in Joshua to the teachings of Jesus, the book highlights the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, urging readers to embrace a faith that is responsive to God's call and inclusive of those who may appear to be outsiders.

8. Ongoing Relevance

Earl posits that the themes in Joshua remain relevant today, particularly in discussions about community, identity, and ethical behavior in the face of violence and conflict. He argues that contemporary readers can draw important lessons from the text, especially in light of current global issues related to religiously motivated violence and genocide. By rethinking the narratives of Joshua, readers can engage with the text in a way that promotes peace, understanding, and a commitment to justice.

Key Aspects of Earl's Critique of the Bible:

1. **Challenging Traditional Interpretations:** Earl critiques the conventional understanding of the Book of Joshua as a literal historical account of conquest and genocide. He argues that such interpretations can lead to harmful ideologies that justify violence in the name of faith.
2. **Reexamining Divine Commands:** By analyzing the concept of "*herem*" and its implications, Earl questions the morality of attributing acts of violence directly to divine command. This critique invites readers to reconsider how they understand God's will and the ethical implications of biblical narratives.
3. **Symbolism vs. Literalism:** The book advocates for a symbolic reading of the texts rather than a literal one. This approach critiques the tendency to view biblical accounts as direct instructions for behavior, suggesting that such readings can distort the intended messages of love, justice, and mercy.
4. **Ethical Implications:** Earl emphasizes that the narratives should not be used to justify contemporary violence or discrimination. This stance critiques interpretations that have historically led to justifications for harmful actions against others, particularly in religious contexts.
5. **Inclusivity and Community:** By highlighting characters like Rahab, Earl critiques the exclusivity often found in traditional readings of scripture. He encourages a more inclusive understanding of community and identity, challenging readers to reconsider who is considered part of the faithful community.
6. **Relevance to Modern Issues:** The book connects ancient narratives to contemporary issues of violence and conflict, critiquing how religious texts can be misused to perpetuate harm. Earl calls for a rethinking of these narratives to promote peace and understanding in today's world.

In summary, "*The Joshua Delusion*" serves as a critical examination of specific interpretations of the Bible, particularly those related to the narratives found in the Book of Joshua. Earl's work is not an outright rejection of the Bible; rather, it is a call for a more nuanced and thoughtful engagement with scripture. By criticizing traditional

interpretations, reexamining divine commands, and advocating for symbolic readings, Earl seeks to foster a deeper understanding of faith that promotes ethical behavior and inclusivity.

Testimony #37: Tuchman - Bible and Sword (2011)

The Author: **Barbara W. Tuchman** (January 30, 1912 – February 6, 1989) was an American historian, journalist and author. She won the Pulitzer Prize twice, for *The Guns of August* (1962), a best-selling history of the prelude to and the first month of World War I, and *Stilwell and the American Experience in China* (1971), a biography of General Joseph Stilwell.²⁵

The Book: "*Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour*."²⁶ The book presents a nuanced understanding of the British role in the history of Palestine. The Author argues that the intertwining of religious motivations with imperial ambitions has shaped the trajectory of the region, leading to ongoing conflicts and struggles for identity.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Historical Context

Tuchman traces the long-standing relationship between England and Palestine, beginning with ancient connections and extending through significant historical events, including the Crusades, the rise of Zionism, and culminating in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. She emphasizes the importance of historical narratives in shaping contemporary views on the region.

2. Cultural and Religious Motivations

The book asserts that British interest in Palestine was driven by a combination of cultural and religious factors. Tuchman explores how the Bible shaped English identity and consciousness, leading to a sense of moral obligation toward the Jewish people. This religious motivation was often intertwined with political ambitions, as British leaders sought to expand their empire and influence in the Middle East.

3. The Crusades

Tuchman dedicates significant attention to the Crusades, portraying them as a critical period in which England sought to reclaim Jerusalem for Christendom. She discusses the motivations behind the Crusades, including the desire for glory, wealth, and the spread of Christianity. The narratives of heroism and sacrifice during this time contributed to a lasting British fascination with the Holy Land.

4. The Balfour Declaration

The Balfour Declaration, issued during World War I, is a central focus of the book. Tuchman argues that it marked a pivotal moment in recognizing Jewish aspirations for a homeland in Palestine. She analyzes the political dynamics at play, including the influence of Zionist leaders and the strategic interests of the British government in the context of the war. The declaration is presented as a culmination of centuries of British engagement with the region.

5. Zionism and Jewish Nationalism

Tuchman highlights the emergence of Zionism in the late 19th century, particularly through the efforts of Theodore Herzl. She details Herzl's vision for a Jewish state and his attempts to garner support from influential British leaders. The book discusses the varying responses from the Jewish community and the complexities of Jewish identity during this period, emphasizing the tension between assimilation and nationalism.

6. Imperial Strategy

The strategic importance of Palestine for British imperial interests is a recurring theme. Tuchman illustrates how control over Palestine was seen as vital for securing trade routes and maintaining stability in the region, particularly concerning the Suez Canal and access to India. She discusses the geopolitical calculations that influenced British policies and actions in Palestine.

7. Conflicts and Tensions

Tuchman addresses the inherent contradictions in British policies toward Jews and Arabs. The book explores how British support for Jewish nationalism often conflicted with the aspirations of the Arab population, leading to tensions that would shape future conflicts. Tuchman emphasizes the failure of British leaders to reconcile these competing nationalisms, which has had lasting implications.

8. Legacy and Influence

In her conclusion, Tuchman reflects on the legacy of British involvement in Palestine and how historical narratives have influenced modern identities and conflicts in the region. She argues that the intertwining of religion, politics, and national identity has created a complex landscape where both Israeli and Palestinian identities are deeply affected by historical events and British policies. The book serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of imperial ambitions and the challenges of nation-building.

9. Personal Reflections

Throughout the book, Tuchman weaves in her personal reflections on the significance of the historical events she describes. She expresses concern about the enduring impact of colonialism and the ways in which historical injustices continue to resonate in contemporary politics. Her narrative is not just a historical account but also a commentary on the moral responsibilities of nations in addressing the legacies of their past actions

Critical Reflections on the Bible and its Moral Implications

1. **Historical Context:** Tuchman examines how the Bible has been used to justify political and imperial actions, which can prompt readers to consider the moral implications of using religious texts to support state policies.
2. **Religious Motivations vs. Political Actions:** The book highlights the tension between the moral teachings of the Bible and the often-self-serving actions of nations, particularly in the context of colonialism and the treatment of various peoples.
3. **Contradictions:** Tuchman discusses the contradictions between the ethical ideals presented in the Bible and the realpolitik of British imperialism, prompting a critique of how religious narratives can be manipulated for political ends.
4. **Cultural Impact:** The influence of the Bible on British identity and policy raises questions about the role of religious texts in shaping national narratives and justifying actions that may conflict with their moral teachings.
5. **Moral Responsibility:** Tuchman's reflections on the consequences of British actions in Palestine can be seen as a commentary on the moral responsibilities of nations and individuals in interpreting and applying religious teachings.

In conclusion, while "*Bible and Sword*" may not explicitly aim to critique the Bible itself, Tuchman's exploration of its historical use and implications serves as a platform for critical reflection on its teachings and moral foundations. The book encourages readers to consider the complexities of faith, morality, and politics, highlighting the potential for religious narratives to be both a source of inspiration and a justification for conflict. By examining the interplay between the Bible and British imperialism, Tuchman ultimately invites a nuanced discussion about the ethical responsibilities that come with interpreting and applying religious teachings in the context of historical actions and contemporary issues.

Testimony #38: DeConick - Holy Misogyny (2011)

The Author: April D. DeConick is the Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Rice University in Houston, Texas. She came to Rice University as a full professor in 2006, after receiving tenure at Illinois Wesleyan University in 2004. DeConick is the author of several books in the field of Early Christian Studies and is best known for her work on the Gospel of Thomas and ancient Gnosticism.²⁷

The Book: "*Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*."²⁸ The book serves as a profound critique of the Bible and its moral implications, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. Through her examination of gender bias, reinterpretation of key figures, critique of sexual morality, and emphasis on cultural context, the Author challenges readers to reconsider the narratives that have shaped Christian thought.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Introduction of Gender Issues

DeConick opens by addressing the historical absence of a feminine aspect of God in Christian theology, particularly the figure of the Mother God. She emphasizes that this absence has significant implications for understanding gender and sexuality within the early Christian context. By examining her son's innocent question about "Lady God," she sets the stage for exploring how traditional views of God have shaped societal attitudes toward women.

2. Erasure of the Mother God

The book delves into how the feminine aspect of God, often represented as the Holy Spirit or Wisdom (Sophia), was present in early Jewish and Christian traditions but became marginalized over time. DeConick traces the theological developments that led to the erasure of the Mother God from mainstream Christianity, arguing that this shift contributed to a patriarchal understanding of divinity. She discusses the implications of this erasure, suggesting that it has fostered a culture of misogyny within the church.

3. Jesus and Sexuality

DeConick explores Jesus' views on sex and sexuality, noting that while he recognized the importance of marriage for controlling sexual desire, his teachings also reflect a degree of ambivalence. She points out that Jesus' teachings suggest

that sexual desire can lead to sin and that he advocated for self-control. The author examines specific passages from the Gospels to illustrate how Jesus navigated complex issues of sexuality, reinforcing the idea that while sex within marriage was acceptable, it was still fraught with moral implications.

4. Paul's Influence

The author analyzes Paul's letters, which reveal a complicated relationship with women and sexuality. While Paul acknowledges the roles of women in the early church, he also imposes restrictions that reflect the patriarchal norms of his time. Notably, he instructs women to remain silent in churches and to seek knowledge from their husbands, which DeConick interprets as an attempt to curb the emerging authority of women in the Christian community. This tension between recognition of women's contributions and the enforcement of subordination is a central theme in DeConick's analysis.

5. Encratism

DeConick discusses the encratic movement, which emerged in early Christianity and advocated for celibacy and strict sexual restraint. This movement viewed marriage and procreation as sinful, promoting an ascetic lifestyle that prioritized spiritual pursuits over physical desires. She examines various early Christian groups that adopted encratic practices, illustrating how this lifestyle reflected broader anxieties about sexuality and the body.

6. Mary Magdalene's Role

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to Mary Magdalene, whose narrative has undergone substantial reinterpretation over the centuries. DeConick highlights Mary's role as a prominent disciple and leader in the early church, arguing that she was mischaracterized as a repentant sinner in later traditions. The book explores how her story was reframed to align with patriarchal values, reducing her influence and authority within the Christian narrative. DeConick emphasizes that Mary's original portrayal as a leader and apostle has been largely overshadowed by her association with sin.

7. Misogyny in Early Christianity

DeConick provides a critical examination of the misogynistic interpretations of scripture that have historically marginalized women. She argues that these interpretations have framed women as temptresses, linking their bodies with sin and portraying them as inherently flawed. The author discusses how such views have been perpetuated through theological writings and church practices, contributing to a culture of violence and discrimination against women.

8. Cultural Context

The author situates these gender issues within the broader cultural and religious milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world. She emphasizes that societal views on gender were deeply intertwined with religious beliefs, influencing how women were perceived and treated within both Jewish and Christian communities. DeConick argues that understanding this cultural context is essential for grasping the complexities of gender dynamics in early Christianity.

9. Contemporary Implications

DeConick asserts that the legacy of these early church conflicts continues to impact modern Christian practices and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. She highlights how the historical marginalization of women in the church has led to ongoing issues of inequality and discrimination in contemporary religious settings. The author calls for a critical reevaluation of these narratives to foster a more inclusive and equitable understanding of faith.

10. Call for Recovery

Finally, DeConick advocates for a recovery of the feminine divine and a reexamination of women's roles in Christianity. She encourages readers to challenge traditional interpretations of scripture that have perpetuated misogyny and to seek a more inclusive understanding of the divine that honors both genders. The book concludes with a call for feminist theology that recognizes the contributions of women in the early church and seeks to restore their rightful place within the Christian narrative.

Critique of the Bible and its Moral Implications:

1. **Examination of Gender Bias:** DeConick critically analyzes how biblical texts have been interpreted to reinforce patriarchal structures and marginalize women. She highlights instances where scripture has been used to justify misogyny and control over women's roles in both religious and societal contexts.
2. **Reinterpretation of Key Figures:** The book reexamines the roles of significant biblical figures, such as Mary Magdalene, arguing that traditional interpretations have often diminished their importance and contributions. This reevaluation questions the moral authority of interpretations that have historically silenced women's voices.
3. **Critique of Sexual Morality:** DeConick explores the biblical views on sexuality, particularly the teachings of Jesus and Paul, which often promote restrictive views on sex and marriage. She critiques the moral frameworks that label sexuality as sinful or problematic, especially for women, and discusses the

implications of these views for contemporary beliefs about gender and morality.

4. **Cultural Context:** By placing biblical narratives within their historical and cultural contexts, DeConick reveals how societal norms influenced the writings and interpretations of scripture. This contextualization serves to critique the notion that biblical morality is absolute or unchanging.
5. **Call for Feminist Theology:** The author advocates for a feminist theological approach that challenges traditional interpretations of the Bible. By calling for a recovery of the feminine divine and a reevaluation of women's roles, she critiques the existing moral frameworks that have excluded or devalued women.

In summary, "*Holy Misogyny*" serves as a profound critique of the Bible and its moral implications, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. Through her examination of gender bias, reinterpretation of key figures, critique of sexual morality, and emphasis on cultural context, DeConick challenges readers to reconsider the narratives that have shaped Christian thought.

Testimony #39: Boer - The Earthly Nature of the Bible (2012)

The Author: Roland Boer is an Australian theologian and scholar of Marxism. He was awarded the Deutscher Memorial Prize in 2014. Boer obtained a bachelor's degree in divinity from the University of Sydney. He was a Professor at University of Newcastle (Australia). In 2004, he founded the peer-reviewed academic journal *The Bible and Critical Theory*.²⁹

The Book: "*The Earthly Nature of the Bible: Fleshly Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality*."³⁰ The book presents a bold and provocative interpretation of biblical texts, particularly focusing on themes of sexuality, masculinity, and carnality. The Author challenges traditional, often sanitized readings of the Bible that tend to emphasize allegorical or moral interpretations, advocating instead for a more literal and sensory understanding of the texts.

Summary of Key Themes:

1. Fleshly Readings:

- Boer argues that the Song of Songs, often interpreted as an allegory of divine love, should instead be read literally as a celebration of human sexuality. He emphasizes the sensual imagery and the physicality of the text, suggesting that it reflects a deeply embodied understanding of love and desire.
- He criticizes the tendency of interpreters to substitute one form of allegory for another, essentially replacing human erotic love with spiritual or divine allegories. This, he argues, diminishes the text's richness and complexity.

2. Masculinity:

- A significant portion of the book is dedicated to exploring the representation of masculinity in biblical literature. Boer introduces the concept of "testicular logic," examining how terms related to male anatomy are embedded within the language and cultural practices of the time.
- He discusses how masculinity in the Bible is often tied to power dynamics, strength, and vulnerability. For instance, the language surrounding male anatomy not only denotes physical characteristics but also conveys deeper ideological meanings related to courage, honor, and societal roles.

- Boer highlights the ways in which biblical texts reflect and perpetuate patriarchal structures, while also revealing the inherent fragility and vulnerability of male bodies.

3. **Psychoanalysis and Desire:**

- Drawing heavily on psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Boer connects the notions of desire and repetition to the interpretation of biblical texts. He posits that desire is central to understanding the dynamics at play within the narratives.
- Boer explores how the repetition of certain themes and images within the texts serves to incite desire, mirroring Lacan's ideas about the relationship between desire and the Other. He suggests that the texts themselves can be seen as manifestations of desire, reflecting the complexities of human emotion and longing.

4. **Ecocriticism:**

- The book incorporates ecocritical perspectives, examining how nature and non-human elements are represented in the Bible. Boer argues that the natural world is portrayed as a vital, self-producing entity, which plays an essential role in the biblical narrative.
- He critiques anthropocentric readings of the texts, suggesting that the flora and fauna depicted within them have their own agency and significance, independent of human interpretation. This perspective invites readers to consider the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment in biblical thought.

5. **Sexuality and Bestiality:**

- Boer delves into the presence of sexual themes, including bestiality, within biblical texts, arguing that these themes reflect deeper cultural and social realities of the ancient Near East.
- He contrasts the prohibitions against bestiality found in the Hebrew Bible with the more permissive attitudes evident in Hittite law. This comparison highlights the complexities of sexual ethics and the fluidity of sexual norms across cultures.
- Boer suggests that the biblical laws surrounding sexuality are not merely moral injunctions but are deeply intertwined with issues of power, identity, and cultural values.

6. Intertextuality and Cultural Context:

- Boer emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural and historical contexts in which the biblical texts were produced. He encourages readers to explore intertextual connections with other ancient Near Eastern literature, revealing how these texts influence and inform one another.
- By situating biblical narratives within a broader cultural framework, Boer aims to uncover the shared themes and motifs that resonate across different traditions, enriching the reader's understanding of the biblical material.

Critique of the Bible and its Morality:

1. Challenging Traditional Interpretations:

- Boer questions conventional readings of biblical texts, particularly those that sanitize or allegorize their content. By advocating for a literal interpretation, especially regarding sexuality and desire, he critiques the tendency to overlook the raw and often crude aspects of the Bible.

2. Exploration of Sexuality:

- The book delves into sexual themes, including those that may be considered taboo or morally questionable, such as bestiality. By bringing these topics to the forefront, Boer critiques the moral frameworks that often govern biblical interpretation, suggesting that they can obscure the text's more complex realities.

3. Masculinity and Power Dynamics:

- Boer's examination of masculinity reveals how biblical texts reflect and perpetuate patriarchal structures. This critique highlights the ways in which the Bible can reinforce harmful gender norms and power dynamics, questioning its moral authority on issues of gender and sexuality.

4. Ecocritical Perspectives:

- By emphasizing the agency of the natural world within biblical narratives, Boer critiques anthropocentric views that dominate traditional interpretations. This challenges the moral implications of human dominion over nature as presented in the Bible.

5. Psychoanalytic Insights:

- The incorporation of psychoanalytic theory allows Boer to explore the underlying desires and motivations present in the texts. This approach critiques the moral absolutism often associated with biblical teachings by revealing the complexities of human emotion and behavior.

6. Humor and Irony:

- Boer's use of humor and irony serves to critique the seriousness with which many approaches biblical texts. By presenting the material in a more irreverent manner, he invites readers to question the moral weight often ascribed to these writings.

In conclusion, Roland Boer's "*The Earthy Nature of the Bible*" serves as a multifaceted critique of the Bible, its teachings, and its moral implications. By challenging traditional interpretations, exploring complex themes of sexuality and masculinity, incorporating ecocritical perspectives, and employing psychoanalytic insights, Boer invites readers to confront the complexities and contradictions within the biblical texts. Ultimately, Boer's work calls for a reexamination of how the Bible is interpreted and applied in contemporary contexts, urging readers to engage with its content in all its rawness and complexity.

Testimony #40: Seibert - The Violence of Scripture (2012)

The Author: Eric A. Seibert is Professor of Old Testament at Messiah College and the author of a number of books and articles. Eric is the winner of the Society of Biblical Literature Regional Scholar Award (Eastern Great Lakes, 2005) and has served as President of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society (2010-2011). Eric has also served as the Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Initiative at Messiah College.³¹

The Book: "*The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*."³² The book invites readers to explore the intricate connections between ancient civilizations and their narratives, challenging the traditional views of the Bible as an entirely unique document. By highlighting the shared elements between the Babylonian and Biblical stories, de Lafayette encourages a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context in which these narratives emerged.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Thesis and Purpose:** Eric A. Seibert's primary thesis asserts that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, has frequently been wielded to justify acts of violence and oppression throughout history. The book aims to confront and dismantle these harmful interpretations by advocating for a nonviolent approach to reading scripture. Seibert emphasizes that the Bible should never be used to inspire or condone violence against others and seeks to provide readers with tools to engage with these texts ethically.
2. **Historical Context:** Seibert delves into the historical misuse of biblical texts, illustrating how scripture has been invoked to legitimize atrocities such as genocide, slavery, and systemic violence against marginalized groups, particularly women and children. He discusses specific historical events, such as the Mystic River Massacre in 1637, where Puritan settlers justified their brutal actions against the Pequot tribe by referencing Old Testament narratives. This historical backdrop serves to highlight the serious implications of how scripture can be misinterpreted and misapplied.
3. **Nature of Violence in the Old Testament:** The Old Testament is replete with narratives that depict "virtuous" violence—acts that are portrayed positively and receive divine sanction. Seibert examines various texts that illustrate this phenomenon, including commands for warfare and the extermination of enemies, such as the Canaanites. He raises critical ethical questions regarding these

portrayals, arguing that they pose significant challenges for modern readers who seek to reconcile their faith with contemporary moral standards.

4. **Reading Strategies:** To counter the troubling legacy of violence in the Old Testament, Seibert proposes several strategies for reading these texts nonviolently:
 - **Active Reading:** He advocates for active engagement with the text, encouraging readers to approach scripture not as passive recipients but as critical thinkers who question and analyze the content.
 - **Questioning the Text:** Seibert emphasizes the importance of asking tough moral and ethical questions about the narratives, particularly concerning the implications of violent actions and divine commands.
 - **Ethical Critique:** Readers are urged to challenge the values and assumptions embedded within the text, especially those that condone or celebrate violence. This critique is seen as essential for responsible biblical interpretation.
5. **Impact on Readers:** The book discusses the psychological and social impact of reading violent texts uncritically. Seibert warns that exposure to "virtuous" violence can desensitize readers, making them more susceptible to violent ideologies. He stresses that when readers passively accept these narratives, they risk normalizing harmful attitudes and behaviors, which can lead to real-world consequences. Therefore, he calls for a conscious effort to recognize and resist these ideologies, promoting a more compassionate and just interpretation of scripture.
6. **Voices of the Marginalized:** Seibert underscores the necessity of reading from the perspective of victims within the biblical narratives. This includes individuals who have been marginalized, such as women, children, and those from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. By focusing on the experiences and suffering of these individuals, readers can challenge the narrative of "virtuous" violence and develop a more nuanced understanding of the text. Seibert argues that this approach allows readers to see the human cost of violence and fosters empathy for those who are often rendered invisible within the scriptural accounts.
7. **Biblical Authority:** The author engages with the complexities surrounding biblical authority, suggesting that it should be understood functionally based on what the text does rather than its presumed divine origin. Seibert critiques the traditional view that equates biblical authority with historical accuracy and theological reliability, arguing that such a perspective can lead to harmful interpretations. Instead, he posits that the authority of scripture lies in its ability to inspire ethical living and promote justice and love.

8. **Call to Action:** Seibert issues a clarion call for readers, particularly those in positions of religious authority, to adopt nonviolent readings of scripture. He encourages them to actively confront and critique violent texts, emphasizing the importance of ethical responsibility in biblical interpretation. By doing so, he hopes to prevent the perpetuation of harm that has historically been associated with misreading of the Old Testament.

Critique of the Bible and Its Teachings:

1. **Historical Misuse:** Seibert critiques how biblical texts have been historically misused to justify acts of violence, such as genocide and slavery, arguing that these interpretations are not only harmful but also morally indefensible.
2. **Violent Narratives:** He examines the presence of "virtuous" violence in the Old Testament, questioning the ethical implications of these narratives and how they can be interpreted in ways that promote harm rather than healing.
3. **Call for Critical Engagement:** Seibert encourages readers to engage critically with scripture, advocating for a nonviolent reading approach that challenges traditional interpretations that condone violence. This call for critical engagement can be seen as a critique of the complacency often found in religious communities regarding violent texts.
4. **Ethical Responsibility:** By emphasizing the need for ethical responsibility in biblical interpretation, Seibert critiques the tendency to accept scripture uncritically. He argues that readers must actively question and challenge the texts to prevent perpetuating harmful ideologies.
5. **Reimagining Authority:** Seibert's discussion on biblical authority also critiques the traditional views that equate authority with historical accuracy and divine sanction. He suggests that understanding authority functionally—based on ethical implications—opens the door for more compassionate interpretations.

In summary, Eric A. Seibert's *"The Violence of Scripture"* serves as a profound critique of specific interpretations of the Bible and its teachings, particularly those that condone violence and oppression. Through historical analysis, ethical scrutiny, and a call for critical engagement, Seibert challenges readers to confront the troubling legacy of the Old Testament. His work not only highlights the dangers of uncritical acceptance of scripture but also advocates for a more compassionate, justice-oriented approach to biblical interpretation. Ultimately, Seibert's critique encourages readers to navigate the complexities of scripture thoughtfully, fostering interpretations that align with the values of love, justice, and nonviolence.

Testimony #41: de Lafayette - Babylonian Origin of Noah's Deluge (2014)

The Author: Maximillien de Lafayette is the world's most prolific author and scholar, and one of the brightest minds in modern times. He wrote more than 2500 books, 22 dictionaries of modern & ancient languages, and 9 encyclopedias in 25 languages, stretched over a period of 50 years. Since 1960, his books are read by more than 120 million readers around the world.³³

The Book: "*How the Babylonian Story of the Flood Became the Story of the Great Deluge in the Bible, and How Utnapishtim Became Noah*."³⁴ The book invites readers to explore the intricate connections between ancient civilizations and their narratives, challenging the traditional views of the Bible as an entirely unique document. By highlighting the shared elements between the Babylonian and Biblical stories, de Lafayette encourages a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context in which these narratives emerged.

Summary of Main Points:

1. Historical Context:

- The narrative of the Great Flood in the Babylonian tradition predates the Biblical account by roughly 600 years. Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest flood story appeared in the "*Epic of Atrahasis*," which dates back to around 1647-1626 B.C. This was followed by the "*Epic of Gilgamesh*," which includes a similar flood narrative and was composed around 1100 B.C.
- The author emphasizes that this timeline indicates a significant cultural exchange between the Babylonians and the early Hebrews, particularly during the Babylonian exile.

2. Shared Themes:

- The Babylonian and Biblical flood stories share numerous thematic and narrative elements:
 - **Divine Warning:** Both narratives feature a deity warning a chosen individual about an impending flood. In the Babylonian version, the

god Ea warns Utnapishtim, while in the Biblical account, Yahweh warns Noah.

- **Instructions for Building a Vessel:** Each story includes detailed instructions on how to construct a boat or ark to survive the flood. Utnapishtim receives precise measurements and materials from Ea, paralleling the instructions Noah receives from God in Genesis.
- **Gathering of Animals:** Both protagonists are instructed to gather animals to preserve life. The Babylonian text specifies bringing various creatures aboard, similar to the Biblical directive to bring pairs of each kind.
- **Release of Birds:** After the flood, both Utnapishtim and Noah release birds to determine if the waters have receded, highlighting a crucial moment of hope and transition.
- **Resting on a Mountain:** The conclusion of both stories sees the respective vessels coming to rest on a mountain—Mount Ararat in the Bible and Mount Nimush in the Babylonian epic.

3. Cultural Borrowing:

- De Lafayette argues that the Hebrews did not create an entirely original narrative but instead borrowed extensively from existing Mesopotamian texts. He posits that the transformation of Utnapishtim into Noah represents a theological adaptation, allowing the Hebrews to reshape these older stories to fit their monotheistic beliefs.
- The author claims that this practice of borrowing and adapting was common in ancient cultures, where stories were reinterpreted to serve new religious and cultural contexts.

4. Divine Regret:

- A notable difference between the two accounts is the portrayal of divine regret. In the Babylonian narrative, the gods express sorrow over the destruction caused by the flood, highlighting their emotional response to human suffering. Conversely, in the Biblical account, Yahweh does not express regret for the flood, framing it as a justified punishment for human wickedness and violence.

5. Comparative Analysis:

- The book includes a detailed comparative analysis of excerpts from Babylonian tablets alongside corresponding Biblical verses. This word-for-word comparison reveals striking similarities in language, structure, and themes, reinforcing the notion of direct borrowing.
- De Lafayette meticulously highlights specific phrases and concepts that appear in both narratives, illustrating how the Biblical authors may have adapted these earlier stories to fit their evolving theological framework.

6. **Mythological Influences:**

- The author emphasizes that many foundational Biblical stories, such as those found in Genesis, have roots in older myths from Mesopotamia and surrounding regions. He suggests that the name and characteristics of Yahweh were influenced by various pagan deities worshipped in the ancient Near East, indicating a syncretic development of religious beliefs.
- This argument challenges the notion of the Bible as a wholly original work, instead presenting it as a compilation of earlier traditions, myths, and cultural narratives.

Critique of the Bible and Its Authenticity:

1. **Historical Borrowing:** The author argues that many stories in the Bible, including the Great Flood narrative, are borrowed from older Mesopotamian texts. This suggests that the Bible may not be an original work but rather a compilation of pre-existing myths and stories.
2. **Cultural Syncretism:** De Lafayette posits that the character of Yahweh and many Biblical narratives are amalgamations of various pagan deities and traditions. This challenges the idea of a singular, unique God and raises questions about the origins of Biblical stories.
3. **Questioning Divine Inspiration:** The author contends that, while the Bible contains moral and ethical teachings, it is not the literal word of God. This perspective undermines claims of divine inspiration and authenticity often associated with the text.
4. **Comparative Analysis:** By providing a detailed comparison between Babylonian texts and Biblical accounts, the book highlights similarities that suggest a lack of originality in the Biblical narrative. This comparative approach serves to critique the authenticity of the Bible as an independent religious document.

5. **Historical Context:** The book places the Biblical narrative within a broader historical framework, suggesting that the authors of the Bible were influenced by the cultural and religious milieu of their time, which may dilute claims of its unique authenticity.

In summary, "*How the Babylonian Story of the Flood Became the Story of the Great Deluge in the Bible*" serves as a significant critique of the Bible, questioning its authenticity and encouraging readers to engage with the text in a more critical and historically informed manner.

Testimony #42: Crossan - Struggling with Divine Violence (2015)

The Author: John Dominic Crossan is an Irish American New Testament scholar, historian of early Christianity and former Catholic priest who was a prominent member of the Jesus Seminar, and emeritus professor at DePaul University. His research has focused on the historical Jesus, the theology of noncanonical Gospels, and the application of postmodern hermeneutical approaches to the Bible.³⁵

The Book: *"How to Read the Bible & Still Be a Christian: Struggling with Divine Violence from Genesis Through Revelation."*³⁶ The author of the book calls for a reevaluation of how Christians engage with the Bible, advocating for a reading that prioritizes the nonviolent teachings of Jesus and recognizes the complexities and contradictions within the biblical text. He emphasizes that understanding the Bible requires acknowledging its historical context and the evolving interpretations of its messages.

Summary of Main Themes:

1. **Tension in the Bible:** Crossan explores the inherent tension within the Christian Bible between being a faithful reader and a faithful Christian. He argues that the text presents conflicting images of God—both as a figure of love and mercy and as one who enacts violence and retribution. This tension raises questions about how Christians can reconcile these portrayals with their beliefs.
2. **Historical Context:** The author emphasizes the importance of understanding biblical texts within their historical and cultural contexts. He discusses the significant influence of Roman imperialism on the early Christian movement, illustrating how the socio-political environment shaped the narratives and teachings found in the Bible. Crossan also highlights Mesopotamian traditions that inform biblical stories, suggesting that many biblical concepts were adaptations of earlier cultural ideas.
3. **Radicality vs. Normalcy:** One of the central arguments of the book is the contrast between the radical teachings of Jesus and the early Christian movement and the subsequent normalization of these teachings within the structures of civilization and empire. Crossan illustrates how the early followers of Jesus espoused a nonviolent resistance to oppression, which later became co-opted by the prevailing norms of power, leading to a diluted message that often aligned with imperial interests.

4. **Covenant Concept:** The book examines the concept of covenant as it appears throughout the Bible. Crossan notes that the original understanding of covenant in texts like Genesis emphasizes distributive justice, where God's relationship with humanity is characterized by fairness and equity. However, this shifts in later texts, particularly in Deuteronomy, where the focus moves toward retributive justice, suggesting that failure to uphold the covenant results in divine punishment.
5. **Prophecy and Prayer:** Crossan highlights the role of prophets in the biblical tradition, who serve as voices advocating for social justice and divine accountability. He discusses how prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah challenged the ruling powers and called for justice for the oppressed. Their messages often faced significant opposition, illustrating the tension between divine justice and human authority.
6. **Wisdom and Kingdom Traditions:** The author delves into the Wisdom literature and the eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God. He argues that these traditions present a nuanced understanding of justice, mercy, and the character of God. The Wisdom literature, particularly, emphasizes the importance of ethical living and the pursuit of justice as integral to a faithful life.
7. **Paul's Theology:** Crossan examines the letters of Paul, noting how they reflect a radical vision of equality and justice. He discusses Paul's views on issues such as slavery and gender, emphasizing that Paul's theology promotes the idea that in Christ, traditional social hierarchies are dismantled. However, Crossan contrasts this with later interpretations of Paul's writings that reinforce patriarchal norms and the acceptance of slavery, demonstrating how the radical message was often subverted.
8. **Violence in Revelation:** The book critiques the violent imagery found in the Book of Revelation. Crossan argues that this text represents a significant departure from the nonviolent message of Jesus. He suggests that the apocalyptic visions of violence and divine retribution reflect the influence of Roman imperial theology, which sought to justify violence as a means of achieving peace and order.

Critique of the Bible:

1. Examination of Divine Violence:

Crossan critically analyzes instances of divine violence in the Bible, questioning how these portrayals align with the teachings of Jesus. He challenges the notion of a violent God and urges readers to reconsider how such depictions affect moral understanding.

2. Contradictions in Texts:

The book highlights contradictions within the biblical narrative, particularly between the Old and New Testaments. Crossan points out the tension between the nonviolent message of Jesus and the violent imagery in texts like Revelation, suggesting that these inconsistencies raise important ethical questions.

3. Historical Context:

By situating biblical texts within their historical and cultural contexts, Crossan critiques the traditional interpretations that often overlook the socio-political influences on the scriptures. He argues that understanding these contexts is essential for interpreting the moral implications of biblical teachings.

4. Reinterpretation of Key Concepts:

Crossan reevaluates fundamental concepts such as covenant, justice, and prophecy, suggesting that traditional interpretations may reinforce unjust structures rather than promote genuine ethical behavior. He calls for a rethinking of these concepts to align more closely with principles of love and justice.

5. Challenge to Institutional Christianity:

The book critiques how institutional Christianity has historically co-opted and normalized the radical teachings of Jesus, often aligning them with power structures rather than challenging them. Crossan argues that this has led to a diluted moral message that fails to address issues of justice and equality.

6. Call for Nonviolence and Justice:

Crossan emphasizes the importance of nonviolence and social justice as central to Jesus's message. By advocating for these principles, he critiques interpretations of Christianity that ignore or contradict these foundational values.

Overall, John Dominic Crossan's *"How to Read the Bible and Still Be a Christian"* serves as a profound critique of the Bible, its teachings, and its moral implications. While he highlights the complexities and contradictions within the biblical text, he also calls for a critical engagement with scripture that prioritizes ethical considerations. Crossan's work encourages readers to grapple with the challenging aspects of their faith and to seek interpretations that align with the principles of love, justice, and nonviolence. By doing so, he aims to empower Christians to embrace a faith that is both intellectually honest and deeply committed to addressing contemporary moral issues, ultimately fostering a more compassionate and just society.

Testimony #43: Hofreiter - Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide (2018)

The Author: Christian Hofreiter is a Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics (OCCA). From 2008-2012, Hofreiter served with the Oxford Pastorate as a chaplain to the graduate student body at the University of Oxford.³⁷

The Book: "*Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide: Christian Interpretations of Herem Passages*."³⁸ The book delves into the intricate and often troubling portrayals of divine violence in the Bible, particularly within the Old Testament. The Author aims to reconcile these narratives with the Christian understanding of God as loving and merciful, especially considering Jesus Christ's teachings on nonviolence.

Introduction

- The book tackles the hermeneutical challenge presented by *herem* texts in the Old Testament, which commands the destruction of entire populations, often interpreted as genocidal.
- Hofreiter frames the discussion around five propositions that pose a dilemma for readers:
 - i. God is good.
 - ii. The Bible is true.
 - iii. Genocide is atrocious.
 - iv. According to the Bible, God commanded and commended genocide.
 - v. A good being would never command or commend an atrocity.

This framework sets the stage for exploring how these texts have been received and interpreted throughout history.

Historical Reception

- The reception of *herem* texts within both the Old and New Testaments was largely uncritical, with early readers often accepting the texts at face value.
- Jewish interpreters, such as Philo of Alexandria, recognized moral issues raised by these texts but often chose to avoid direct confrontation with them, either by omitting problematic passages or interpreting them figuratively.

- The historical context of these interpretations reveals a lack of engagement with the ethical implications of the commands, suggesting a tendency to prioritize tradition over moral scrutiny.

Dissenting Readings

- Marcion, a pivotal figure in the second century, proposed a radical solution to the tensions posed by the *herem* texts. He argued that the God depicted in the Jewish Scriptures was fundamentally different from the God revealed by Jesus Christ, whom he characterized as good and merciful.
- Marcion's rejection of the Jewish Scriptures stemmed from their violent content, particularly commands to annihilate nations, which he viewed as incompatible with the teachings of Jesus.
- Other dissenting voices, like Ptolemy and the authors of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, adopted a similar stance by asserting that parts of the Jewish Scriptures were false or that they represented an accommodation to human imperfection, rather than divine will.

Figurative Readings

- Origen of Alexandria is highlighted as a significant early Christian interpreter who directly addressed the moral challenges posed by *herem* texts. He emphasized the need to read these texts figuratively rather than literally.
- Origen argued that the wars described in the Old Testament symbolize spiritual battles against sin and evil rather than historical events. He posited that the narratives serve a pedagogical purpose, teaching readers about the importance of faith and moral integrity.
- He encouraged readers to interpret the Old Testament through a Christological lens, asserting that the violent commands should be understood in light of Jesus' teachings about peace and love.
- Origen's emphasis on the spiritual meaning of these texts became a dominant interpretive lens in the subsequent Christian tradition, influencing medieval readings and devotional practices.

Divine Command Theory

- Some theologians, particularly Augustine and later figures like Reinke, defended the *herem* commands through the lens of divine command theory, which posits that God's commands are inherently just and good.

- This perspective argues that because God issued the commands, they cannot be morally wrong, regardless of their violent content. Augustine's writings, in particular, have been influential in shaping this defense.
- However, modern critiques challenge this interpretation by questioning the morality of divine commands that seem to endorse violence and genocide, suggesting that such a view may lead to troubling implications about the nature of God.

Progressive Revelation

- The concept of progressive revelation is introduced as a way to reconcile the apparent moral contradictions in the *herem* texts. This idea suggests that God's commands evolved over time, reflecting a gradual revelation of divine will.
- Eleonore Stump contributes to this discussion by arguing that the annihilation commands may have served as a means of teaching the Israelites about divine justice and the consequences of sin.
- Stump posits that the commands were not intended to be permanent but rather pedagogical, aimed at shaping the moral understanding of the Israelite people.

Modern Implications

- Hofreiter discusses contemporary interpretations of *herem*, highlighting the ongoing relevance of these texts in discussions about violence, ethics, and morality in religious contexts.
- Seibert advocates for a Christocentric hermeneutic, emphasizing that the portrayal of God in the Old Testament should be interpreted in light of Jesus' teachings, which focus on love, mercy, and nonviolence.
- This approach allows for an affirmation of the goodness of God while questioning the historical reliability of the violent narratives in the Old Testament.

Critique of the Bible and its Morality:

1. **Moral Dilemmas:** Hofreiter explicitly addresses the moral contradictions presented by *herem* texts, framing them as a dilemma for readers who believe in a good and just God. He questions how such commands can coexist with the notion of divine goodness.

2. **Historical Context:** The book critiques the historical reception of these texts, highlighting how early interpreters often avoided confronting the ethical implications of the violent commands. This suggests a reluctance to engage with the moral challenges posed by the scriptures.
3. **Dissenting Voices:** By examining figures like Marcion, who rejected the Old Testament due to its violent content, Hofreiter illustrates how some have critiqued the morality of the biblical texts. This indicates a broader discourse on the ethical implications of scripture.
4. **Figurative Interpretations:** The author discusses how later interpretations, particularly those of Origen, sought to reframe violent texts in a non-literal, spiritual context. This reflects an acknowledgment of the moral issues at stake and a desire to reconcile them with contemporary ethical standards.
5. **Divine Command Theory Critique:** Hofreiter critically engages with divine command theory, which defends the morality of biblical commands based on their divine origin. He highlights the tension between this theory and modern ethical perspectives, questioning whether such justifications are adequate.
6. **Contemporary Relevance:** The book connects the interpretation of these texts to modern discussions about religion and violence, suggesting that the moral implications of *herem* texts are relevant in today's context, particularly in light of religiously motivated violence.

In summary, "*Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide*" serves as a multifaceted critique of the Bible and its morality, particularly regarding the *herem* texts. Through his exploration of moral dilemmas, historical reception, dissenting interpretations, figurative readings, critiques of divine command theory, contemporary relevance, and calls for responsible hermeneutics, Hofreiter challenges readers to confront the ethical implications of biblical texts. His work encourages a critical examination of scripture, urging believers to reconcile their faith with contemporary moral standards and to engage in responsible interpretations that do not perpetuate violence or oppression. This critical engagement reflects a broader discourse within religious communities about the nature of God, the interpretation of sacred texts, and the ethical responsibilities of believers in a complex world.

Testimony #44: Hawk - The Violence of the Biblical God (2019)

The Author: L. Daniel Hawk is Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Ashland Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church.³⁹

The Book: "*The Violence of the Biblical God: Canonical Narrative and Christian Faith*."⁴⁰ The book delves into the intricate and often troubling portrayals of divine violence in the Bible, particularly within the Old Testament. The Author aims to reconcile these narratives with the Christian understanding of God as loving and merciful, especially considering Jesus Christ's teachings on nonviolence.

Summary of Key Concepts:

1. The Problem of Divine Violence:

- Hawk begins by addressing the paradox of a God who is both loving and violent, particularly in narratives where God commands acts of violence, such as the conquest of Canaan.
- He highlights the challenge this presents to contemporary believers, especially given the rise of violent extremism in modern contexts. The book questions how such portrayals of God can coexist with the image of Jesus, who advocates for peace and love.

2. Creation and Fall:

- The book discusses the Creation narratives in Genesis, which depict a world brought into being through divine speech and order, devoid of violence.
- Hawk argues that violence emerges as a consequence of humanity's disobedience, particularly in the story of Adam and Eve, where the desire for autonomy leads to chaos and suffering. This sets the stage for understanding how human choices contribute to the presence of violence in the world.

3. Yahweh's Engagement with Humanity:

- As the narrative unfolds, Hawk illustrates how Yahweh's involvement with humanity becomes increasingly entangled in the violence and chaos of human existence.
- The covenant with Abraham marks a turning point, where Yahweh chooses a specific people to work through, indicating a divine strategy to restore creation. Hawk emphasizes that this relationship is characterized by a

commitment to blessing and justice, despite the violent context in which it is situated.

4. **The Exodus and Conquest:**

- The exodus narrative serves as a powerful example of Yahweh's deliverance from oppression, showcasing God's might against Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods.
- Hawk argues that the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea are not mere acts of violence but are deeply symbolic of God's fight for justice and liberation.
- In the conquest of Canaan, however, the violence becomes more pronounced, as Yahweh commands the Israelites to wipe out the indigenous peoples. Hawk explores how this violence is framed within the larger narrative of establishing a covenant community and fulfilling divine promises.

5. **Historical and Theological Contexts:**

- Hawk examines various historical interpretations of divine violence, tracing how early church fathers and later theologians grappled with these texts.
- He discusses the influence of historical-critical methods on modern biblical scholarship, emphasizing the importance of understanding the cultural and historical contexts in which these texts were written.
- The book critiques simplistic readings that either condemn or justify divine violence without engaging with the complexities of the narratives.

6. **Nonviolence in Jesus' Teachings:**

- A significant portion of the book is dedicated to exploring Jesus' teachings on love for enemies, non-retaliation, and forgiveness.
- Hawk posits that these teachings represent a radical departure from the violent narratives of the Old Testament, inviting readers to reconsider how they interpret God's actions in light of Jesus' example.
- He emphasizes that Jesus' call to love one's enemies is not merely an ethical guideline but a transformative vision that challenges the prevailing norms of violence and retribution.

7. **Implications for Christian Faith:**

- Hawk argues for a critical engagement with scripture, urging Christians to confront the violent texts head-on rather than glossing over them.
- He calls for an ethic rooted in love, justice, and mercy, reflecting the character of God as revealed through Jesus.

- The book encourages believers to foster a community that embodies these values, actively working against violence and oppression in contemporary society.

Critique of the Bible:

1. Examination of Divine Violence:

- Hawk critically analyzes instances of divine violence in the Old Testament, questioning how these narratives align with the character of a loving and just God as revealed in the New Testament through Jesus Christ.
- He tackles the discomfort many believers feel regarding violent texts, suggesting that traditional interpretations may overlook the complexities of the narratives.

2. Cultural Context:

- The book emphasizes the cultural and historical contexts in which the biblical texts were written, arguing that understanding these contexts is crucial for interpreting the morality presented in scripture.
- Hawk suggests that many biblical accounts reflect the values and norms of their time, which may not align with contemporary ethical standards.

3. Challenge to Simplistic Readings:

- Hawk critiques simplistic readings of scripture that either justify violence or ignore it altogether. He encourages readers to confront these difficult texts rather than dismiss them.
- This approach invites a reevaluation of how the church has historically interpreted and applied biblical teachings on violence and morality.

4. Call for Nonviolence:

- By highlighting Jesus' teachings on love, mercy, and nonviolence, Hawk advocates for a moral framework that contrasts sharply with the violent narratives in the Old Testament.
- He argues that the Christian faith should prioritize these nonviolent teachings, challenging believers to live out a more compassionate and just ethic.

5. Invitation to Dialogue:

- The book encourages an ongoing conversation about the implications of divine violence for contemporary faith and practice, suggesting that grappling with these issues can lead to deeper insights and a more authentic faith.

- This dialogue can be seen as a critique of rigid interpretations of scripture that resist questioning and exploration.

In summary, L. Daniel Hawk's "*The Violence of the Biblical God*" serves as a multifaceted critique of the Bible, particularly its teachings on violence and morality. While he does not reject the Bible outright, he challenges readers to engage deeply with its texts, recognizing the complexities and historical contexts that shape them. By emphasizing the teachings of Jesus and advocating for a nonviolent ethic, Hawk invites believers to reconsider how they interpret scripture and live out their faith in a contemporary context. His work encourages a more nuanced and critical approach to biblical interpretation, fostering a dialogue that seeks to reconcile the troubling aspects of divine violence with a commitment to love, justice, and mercy.

Testimony #45: Rainey - Religion, Ethnicity and Xenophobia in the Bible (2019)

The Author: **Brian Rainey** Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. He received a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Brown University and an M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School. His research and writings focus on constructions of race, ethnicity, peoplehood and the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹

The Book: *"Religion, Ethnicity and Xenophobia in the Bible: A Theoretical, Exegetical and Theological Survey."*⁴² The book examines the complex portrayals of "foreigners" within biblical texts, focusing on how these representations intersect with concepts of ethnicity and xenophobia. It is multidisciplinary, drawing on social psychology, anthropology, sociology, and theology to provide a comprehensive analysis of ethnicity and foreignness in ancient literature.

Summary of Key Themes:

1. Conceptualizing Ethnicity and Foreignness:

- Rainey defines ethnicity as a categorization scheme that emphasizes common ancestry and territorial origins. He posits that the ancient writers of biblical texts typically viewed foreigners as members of distinct ethnic groups.
- The author suggests that the notion of ethnic foreignness is not merely a modern construct but is relevant for understanding ancient societies and their interactions.

2. Critique of Biblical Scholarship:

- The book critiques the historical approach of biblical scholarship, which often conflates ethnicity with broader social categories without sufficient theoretical reflection. Rainey emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of ethnicity in biblical studies.
- He highlights how terms like "race" and "ethnicity" have been used casually, often leading to misunderstandings about the ancient contexts in which these concepts were employed.

3. Negative Portrayals of Foreigners:

- Rainey delves into specific biblical texts that depict foreigners in a hostile light, particularly in the Deuteronomistic and Holiness traditions. He examines how these texts reflect and reinforce social hierarchies and ethnic boundaries.
- For instance, he analyzes the rhetoric used against groups like the Canaanites, exploring how these narratives serve to construct a sense of identity for the Israelites while demonizing others.

4. Cultural and Historical Contexts:

- The author discusses the broader cultural and historical contexts that influenced perceptions of foreignness in ancient Israel and Mesopotamia. He argues that geographical and cultural landscapes played significant roles in shaping these narratives.
- Rainey notes that the ideological functions of these portrayals often served the interests of the ruling elites, reflecting their political and social agendas.

5. Theological Implications:

- The book addresses the ethical dilemmas posed by xenophobic texts in the Bible, particularly how these narratives can be reconciled with contemporary values of inclusivity and justice.
- Rainey explores various theological interpretations that attempt to mitigate the violence depicted in these texts, questioning the moral implications of claiming divine sanction for such actions.

6. Contemporary Relevance:

- Rainey draws parallels between the xenophobic rhetoric found in biblical texts and modern issues surrounding race, immigration, and national identity. He highlights how ancient narratives can inform current discussions about ethnicity and belonging.
- He emphasizes the urgency of engaging with these texts critically, particularly in light of rising xenophobia and nationalism in contemporary society.

7. Ethnic Identity and Community:

- The author argues that the construction of ethnic identity in biblical texts is deeply intertwined with notions of community and belonging. He suggests that the negative portrayal of foreigners often serves to solidify in-group identities among the Israelites.
- Rainey also discusses how ancient authors used ethnic rhetoric to negotiate power dynamics, emphasizing that the portrayal of others was often a reflection of internal socio-political struggles.

Critical Examination of Biblical Texts and its Implications:

1. Hostile Portrayals of Foreigners:

- Rainey meticulously analyzes various biblical passages that depict foreigners in a negative light, particularly in texts from the Deuteronomistic history and the Holiness codes. These narratives often portray outsiders as threats to the community, morally corrupt, or divinely condemned.
- By highlighting these hostile portrayals, Rainey critiques the underlying assumptions about ethnicity and belonging that permeate the biblical texts. He argues that these depictions not only reflect ancient social anxieties but also contribute to a legacy of xenophobia that can be observed in contemporary religious and social contexts.

2. Ethical Dilemmas:

- The book raises significant ethical questions regarding how these xenophobic narratives can coexist with the broader moral teachings of the Bible, which often emphasize love, compassion, and justice. Rainey challenges readers to reconcile the violent and exclusionary aspects of biblical texts with the ethical imperatives found in other parts of scripture.
- By doing so, he invites a critical examination of how these texts have been interpreted and applied throughout history, particularly in ways that justify discrimination and violence against marginalized groups.

3. Divine Sanction and Justification:

- Rainey explores how certain biblical passages have been historically used to justify exclusionary practices and ideologies, suggesting that some interpretations present a troubling view of divine will that endorses hostility toward outsiders.
- This examination prompts readers to question the morality of such interpretations and the theological implications of claiming divine sanction for xenophobic attitudes. It raises critical concerns about the ways in which religious authority can be wielded to perpetuate injustice.

4. Revisiting Interpretations:

- The author advocates for a re-evaluation of traditional interpretations of scripture, particularly those that reinforce ethnic boundaries and promote xenophobia. He emphasizes the importance of contextualizing biblical texts within their historical and cultural backgrounds to uncover their complexities.

- Rainey encourages scholars and theologians to seek out interpretations that challenge exclusionary narratives, promoting a more inclusive understanding of community that aligns with contemporary ethical standards.

5. Modern Parallels to Ancient Narratives:

- Rainey draws striking parallels between the xenophobic rhetoric found in biblical texts and contemporary issues related to race, immigration, and national identity. He argues that the same dynamics of fear and exclusion that characterized ancient societies are evident in modern discourse.
- By linking ancient narratives to current events, Rainey critiques how these biblical teachings continue to influence societal attitudes toward "the Other," highlighting the need for critical engagement with scripture in light of present-day realities.

In conclusion, while Brian Rainey does not dismiss the entire biblical tradition, his work offers a profound critique of specific texts and themes that reflect xenophobic attitudes. By engaging critically with these narratives, Rainey reveals the potential for harmful interpretations that can perpetuate discrimination and violence. His examination invites readers to reconsider the moral teachings of the Bible, urging a re-evaluation of how these texts are understood and applied in today's world.

Testimony #46: Nunpa - The Great Evil: Christianity, the Bible, and the Native American Genocide (2020)

The Author: **Chris Mato Nunpa** is a retired Associate Professor of Indigenous Nations & Dakota Studies at Southwest Minnesota State University. He holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus, with the Collateral Field for the Ph.D. in American Indian Studies. He also studied theology at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois.⁴³

The Book: *"The Great Evil: Christianity, the Bible, and the Native American Genocide."*⁴⁴ critically examines the historical and religious underpinnings of genocide against Native Americans, particularly focusing on how Christianity and the Bible were employed to justify violence, land theft, and cultural suppression. The Author argues that these religious justifications have had long-lasting impacts on Indigenous communities and continue to shape perceptions and policies today.

Summary of Key Themes:

1. Historical Context of Genocide:

- Nunpa presents a stark demographic picture, noting that before European contact, approximately 16 million Native Americans inhabited what is now the continental United States. By 1900, due to a combination of violence, disease, and displacement, this population had plummeted to around 237,000. The author emphasizes that this decline was not merely a result of natural causes but rather a systematic campaign of genocide that included massacres, forced removals, and other violent acts.

2. Religious Justifications:

- The book delves into the ways in which biblical texts were manipulated to rationalize the extermination of Indigenous Peoples. Key phrases such as "chosen people" and "promised land" are highlighted as foundational beliefs that led Euro-Americans to perceive themselves as divinely ordained to conquer and civilize. The author discusses how these religious narratives provided moral cover for acts of violence, framing them as part of a divine mission.

3. Manifest Destiny:

- Manifest Destiny is portrayed as a central ideology that fueled the expansionist policies of the United States in the 19th century. Nunpa draws parallels between the experiences of the Israelites in the Old Testament, who were commanded to conquer Canaan, and the actions of Euro-Americans who believed they were entitled to the lands of Indigenous Peoples. This ideology not only justified territorial expansion but also dehumanized Native Peoples, viewing them as obstacles to progress.

4. Specific Incidents of Violence:

- The author recounts several key genocidal events in American history, including the Pequot Holocaust of 1637, where hundreds of Pequot men, women, and children were brutally killed, and the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, where Colonel John Chivington and his troops slaughtered a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho village. Nunpa emphasizes the language used by perpetrators, who often described their violent actions in religious terms, viewing their massacres as righteous deeds.

5. Religious Suppression:

- A significant portion of the book is dedicated to the suppression of Indigenous spiritual practices by Christian missionaries. Nunpa discusses how traditional ceremonies were criminalized and how Indigenous beliefs were dismissed as paganism. This religious imperialism is linked to a broader agenda of cultural genocide, as missionaries sought to impose Christianity on Native Peoples, often through coercion and violence.

6. Cultural Impact:

- The author reflects on the enduring effects of these historical injustices on contemporary Indigenous communities. He discusses how the legacy of genocide, land theft, and cultural suppression has contributed to ongoing issues such as poverty, discrimination, and identity crises among Native Peoples. Nunpa emphasizes that the trauma inflicted on Indigenous communities is not merely a historical footnote but a living reality that continues to affect generations.

7. Call for Acknowledgment:

- Throughout the book, Nunpa urges for a recognition of the genocide against Native Americans and a re-evaluation of American history. He argues that the truths of these events must be acknowledged and taught in schools to foster

understanding and reconciliation. The author calls for a shift in narratives that have long marginalized Indigenous experiences and perspectives.

Critique of the Bible and Its Teachings:

1. Contextual Interpretation:

- Nunpa emphasizes that many biblical passages have been historically misinterpreted or manipulated to serve colonial agendas. He critiques the tendency to extract verses from their historical and cultural context, which can lead to harmful applications. For instance, certain Old Testament stories about conquest and divine favor are often cited to justify the violent dispossession of Indigenous lands. This selective interpretation raises critical questions about the ethical implications of reading the Bible without considering its broader context.

2. Moral Justifications:

- The book highlights how religious leaders and colonizers have used biblical teachings to morally justify atrocities against Indigenous Peoples. Nunpa discusses specific instances where scripture was invoked to rationalize violence, portraying these actions as divinely sanctioned. This critique points to a troubling aspect of religious morality, where the pursuit of power and land is cloaked in a veneer of divine approval, leading to a distortion of true ethical principles.

3. Divine Mandate:

- A significant theme in Nunpa's critique is the notion of a "divine mandate" that some Euro-Americans believed they possessed. This idea posited that they were chosen by God to conquer and civilize the Americas, viewing Indigenous Peoples as obstacles to their divine mission. Nunpa argues that this belief system not only justified genocidal actions but also fostered a sense of superiority and entitlement that had devastating consequences for Native communities. The moral implications of such a worldview are profound, as it raises questions about the nature of divine will and the ethical responsibilities of believers.

4. Religious Imperialism:

- The role of Christian missionaries in suppressing Indigenous spiritual practices is another critical aspect of Nunpa's critique. He discusses how missionaries sought to convert Native Peoples to Christianity, often through coercive means, viewing Indigenous beliefs as inferior or pagan. This imposition of one belief system over another is framed as a form of cultural genocide, where the

rich spiritual traditions of Indigenous Peoples were systematically dismantled. Nunpa critiques this religious imperialism as morally reprehensible, arguing that it reflects a profound misunderstanding of the value of diverse spiritual expressions.

5. **Historical Accountability:**

- Nunpa calls for a reevaluation of how the Bible has been used throughout history, particularly in the context of colonialism and genocide. He argues that acknowledging these historical abuses is essential for understanding the ongoing impact of these actions on contemporary Indigenous communities. This critique extends to the moral responsibilities of religious institutions and their followers, urging them to confront the darker aspects of their history and to seek reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. By grappling with these truths, Nunpa suggests that there is potential for healing and a more ethical engagement with the Bible.

6. **Ethical Frameworks:**

- The book challenges readers to reconsider the ethical frameworks derived from biblical teachings. Nunpa argues that when scripture is used to justify violence and oppression, it undermines the core messages of love, compassion, and justice that are central to many religious traditions. This critique invites a broader discussion about the moral implications of religious texts and the responsibility of believers to interpret them in ways that promote peace and justice rather than division and violence.

7. **Reimagining Faith:**

- Ultimately, Nunpa's work calls for a reimagining of faith that prioritizes justice and equity. He advocates for an understanding of Christianity that acknowledges past wrongs and seeks to rectify them through meaningful dialogue and reparative actions. This reimagining involves not only a critical examination of the Bible but also a commitment to listening to and uplifting Indigenous voices and perspectives.

Conclusion:

In "*The Great Evil*," Chris Mato Nunpa provides a thorough critique of how the Bible and its teachings have been employed to justify morally reprehensible actions throughout history. By examining the intersection of religion, colonialism, and genocide, Nunpa challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the moral implications of these interpretations. His work serves as a call to action for believers to engage with their texts in a way that acknowledges and rectifies past injustices, fostering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of faith that honors the dignity

of all peoples. Through this critical lens, Nunpa not only critiques historical abuses but also envisions a path toward healing and reconciliation, urging a deeper commitment to the ethical principles espoused by many religious traditions.

Testimony #47: Smith - The Bible and Crusade Narrative (2020)

The Author: Katherine Allen Smith is Professor of History at University of Puget Sound. She teaches medieval and early modern history, including courses on the Crusades, women and gender, war and society, and the Renaissance and Reformation.⁴⁵

The Book: "*The Bible and Crusade Narrative in the Twelfth Century (Crusading in Context)*."⁴⁶ The book is a new investigation into the twelfth-century accounts of the First Crusade, showing their complex relationship with the Bible. It presents a comprehensive examination of how biblical texts shaped the narratives surrounding the First Crusade, highlighting the intricate connections between history, theology, and the cultural milieu of the early twelfth century.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Crusading Movement:** The book explores the crusading movement as a pivotal aspect of medieval history, influencing not only Europe but also the Mediterranean and Near East. Smith argues that the crusades were not merely military campaigns but transformative events that shaped societal structures, cultural identities, and religious beliefs across various communities.
2. **Biblical Exegesis:** A central theme of the book is the role of biblical texts and exegetical methods in the formation of crusade narratives. Smith posits that medieval chroniclers extensively utilized scripture to interpret and justify the motivations behind the holy war. This reliance on biblical authority provided a framework for understanding the events of the crusade within a divine narrative, emphasizing the perceived spiritual significance of the crusaders' actions.
3. **Historiographical Context:** The author examines how historians of the twelfth century combined historical writing with biblical interpretation. This approach reflects a medieval understanding of history as a manifestation of God's providence, where events were viewed as part of a larger, divine plan. Smith highlights how chroniclers sought to connect contemporary events with biblical precedents, thereby situating the First Crusade within a continuum of sacred history.

4. **Scriptural References:** Smith conducts a quantitative analysis of biblical references found in the narratives of the First Crusade, revealing a relatively equal distribution of citations from the Old and New Testaments. Notably, the Gospels emerge as a significant source, with the Gospel of Matthew being the most frequently cited book. This suggests that the chroniclers were deeply engaged with the New Testament's teachings, which they employed to frame the crusade as a legitimate expression of Christian values.
5. **Thematic Trends:** The book identifies key themes in the use of scripture throughout the chronicles. One prominent theme is the portrayal of crusaders as new Israelites, drawing parallels between their experiences and those of biblical figures. The chroniclers used typological interpretations to connect the actions of the crusaders with the struggles of the ancient Jewish people, thus legitimizing their holy mission as a continuation of God's covenant with His chosen people.
6. **Moral and Ethical Implications:** Smith discusses how biblical references served to convey moral lessons and spiritual exemplars. The chroniclers highlighted virtues such as humility, sacrifice, and faithfulness, urging their audiences to emulate these qualities in the context of the crusade. The narratives often depicted the crusaders' enemies in a negative light, associating them with faithlessness and idolatry, thus reinforcing the moral righteousness of the crusaders' cause.
7. **Educational Background:** The author emphasizes the educational context in which the chroniclers operated. Many of them were trained in monastic and cathedral schools, where biblical study was central to their intellectual formation. This background influenced their writing styles and interpretive choices, as they were well-versed in the traditions of biblical exegesis and theological discourse.
8. **Cultural Impact:** The text delves into how the narratives reflect the evolving understanding of the crusade within medieval Christianity. Smith argues that the crusade was not only a military endeavor but also a spiritual journey, one that was framed in terms of divine mission and eschatological significance. The chroniclers engaged with contemporary theological debates, using scriptural references to address pressing issues of their time.
9. **Comparative Analysis:** A significant portion of the book compares the accounts of the First Crusade with those of the Norman Conquest of 1066. Smith highlights the differences in how these events were narrated, noting that while both were significant historical moments, the chroniclers approached them with distinct interpretive frameworks. The narratives of the Norman Conquest tend to lack the same level of biblical integration, focusing more on political and military aspects, whereas the crusade narratives are steeped in scriptural language and themes.

10. **Exegetical Revival:** The author discusses the exegetical revival occurring in the early twelfth century, which played a crucial role in shaping how chroniclers interpreted the crusade. This revival fostered new methods of textual criticism and interpretation, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of scripture that went beyond traditional allegorical readings. The chroniclers' engagement with this exegetical tradition allowed them to articulate the significance of the crusade in ways that resonated with their audiences.

Key Aspects of How the Bible Motivated the Crusaders:

1. Divine Justification

The Bible served as a crucial source of divine justification for the Crusaders' actions. Chroniclers often invoked scriptural authority to frame the crusading mission as a divinely ordained endeavor. By interpreting the crusades through biblical narratives, they portrayed the act of taking up arms against non-Christian forces as not only permissible but as a sacred duty. This theological framing helped to legitimize the Crusaders' efforts in reclaiming the Holy Land, suggesting that their actions were aligned with God's will and purpose.

2. Moral Imperative

The teachings found within the Bible provided a moral imperative that motivated many individuals to join the crusade. Chroniclers highlighted biblical virtues such as faith, courage, humility, and sacrifice, presenting these qualities as essential for any true Christian. The notion that participating in the crusade was a way to embody these virtues inspired many to take action, as they believed that fighting for the faith was a demonstration of their commitment to God and a means of achieving spiritual salvation.

3. Historical Continuity

Smith emphasizes the role of historical continuity in motivating the Crusaders. Chroniclers drew parallels between the experiences of the Crusaders and those of biblical figures, particularly the Israelites in their struggles for the Promised Land. By framing the crusade as a continuation of sacred history, chroniclers imbued the mission with a sense of purpose and significance. This connection allowed Crusaders to see themselves as part of a grand divine narrative, further motivating them to engage in what they viewed as a holy struggle.

4. Eschatological Expectations

Eschatological beliefs, which were deeply rooted in biblical texts, also played a significant role in motivating the Crusaders. Many believed that their participation in the crusade could hasten the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of God's kingdom on Earth. This apocalyptic expectation created a sense of urgency, compelling individuals to join the crusade as they sought to fulfill what they perceived as a prophetic mandate. The belief that their actions could have eternal consequences added a profound layer of motivation to their endeavors.

5. Community Identity

The Bible helped forge a collective identity among the Crusaders, fostering a sense of unity and shared mission. By invoking biblical themes and narratives, chroniclers created a framework that encouraged individuals to view themselves as part of a larger Christian community striving toward a common goal. This communal identity was further reinforced through liturgical practices and sermons that emphasized the crusade's significance, motivating individuals to join in solidarity with their fellow believers.

6. Spiritual Warfare

The concept of spiritual warfare, which is prevalent in various biblical texts, was a powerful motivator for the Crusaders. They viewed their battles against non-Christian forces as not just physical conflicts but as spiritual struggles against evil. This framing transformed the act of fighting into a holy endeavor, reinforcing the idea that they were engaged in a righteous cause. The belief that they were fighting for the faith against demonic forces inspired many to take up arms with a sense of divine purpose and conviction.

7. Encouragement through Exegesis

Smith highlights the role of exegetical traditions in motivating the Crusaders. Many chroniclers were well-versed in biblical exegesis, allowing them to interpret scripture in ways that were relevant to their contemporary struggles. By presenting biblical stories as applicable to the crusading mission, they inspired individuals to act in accordance with what they believed to be God's will. This interpretive approach not only encouraged participation but also reinforced the notion that the crusade was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and divine intent.

8. Propaganda and Rhetoric

Additionally, the use of biblical rhetoric in sermons and writings served as a form of propaganda that galvanized support for the crusade. Preachers and chroniclers employed emotionally charged language to evoke feelings of piety and urgency, appealing to the audience's sense of duty and faith. By framing the crusade as a noble

cause rooted in biblical teachings, they motivated individuals from various social classes to join the effort, emphasizing that their participation was a way to serve God and secure salvation.

In summary, the Bible played a multifaceted and profound role in motivating the Crusaders during the twelfth century. Through divine justification, moral imperatives, historical continuity, eschatological expectations, and the fostering of community identity, biblical texts served as a powerful catalyst for action. The concept of spiritual warfare and the encouragement derived from exegetical traditions further enhanced the motivation to participate in the crusade. Katherine Allen Smith's analysis reveals how deeply intertwined biblical narratives were with the motivations and actions of those involved in the crusading movement, illustrating the enduring influence of scripture in shaping medieval thought and behavior. Ultimately, the Bible was not merely a religious text; it was a dynamic force that inspired and directed the actions of the Crusaders, providing them with a sense of purpose and meaning in their holy mission.

Testimony #48: Havrelock - The Joshua Generation (2020)

The Author: Rachel Havrelock is a professor of Jewish studies and English at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is an expert on the Hebrew Bible, ancient Near Eastern literature, and modern Jewish culture.⁴⁷

The Book: "*The Joshua Generation. Israeli Occupation and the Bible (2020)*."⁴⁸ This book examines the Book of Joshua's centrality to the Israeli occupation today, revealing why nationalist longing and social reality are tragically out of sync in the Promised Land. Rachel Havrelock looks at the composition of Joshua, showing how it reflected the fractious nature of ancient Israelite society and a desire to unify the populace under a strong monarchy. She describes how David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, convened a study group at his home in the late 1950s, where generals, politicians, and professors reformulated the story of Israel's founding in the language of Joshua.

Summary of Key Points:

1. **Historical Context:** Rachel Havrelock's book delves into the complex interplay between the biblical figure of Joshua and the modern Israeli political landscape. She argues that the narratives found in the Book of Joshua have significantly influenced contemporary Israeli identity and have been employed to justify the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The text serves as both a historical account and a foundational myth that has shaped national consciousness, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. **Conquest and Settlement:** The book meticulously analyzes the dual narrative of conquest presented in the Book of Joshua. The first half of the text recounts the military campaigns led by Joshua to conquer Canaan, portraying the violent subjugation of local populations. Havrelock emphasizes that this conquest narrative is not merely historical but serves as a symbolic framework for the establishment of Israeli identity. The portrayal of Joshua as a heroic figure who leads the Israelites to victory reinforces the idea of divine support for their territorial claims, which resonates strongly with modern nationalist sentiments.
3. **Cultural and Political Implications:** Havrelock argues that the implications of Joshua's story extend far beyond biblical scholarship into the realm of contemporary Israeli politics. She examines how various political leaders and movements have appropriated the narrative to legitimize actions against Palestinians. The book critiques the instrumental use of biblical texts to rationalize

the occupation and violence, highlighting a troubling disconnect between the ethical teachings of Judaism and the actions taken in its name. This juxtaposition raises questions about the moral foundations of Israeli state policies and the narratives that support them.

4. **The Joshua Study Group:** A significant focus of the book is the influence of David Ben-Gurion's Joshua Study Group, which sought to reinterpret biblical texts to foster a cohesive national identity among diverse Jewish immigrants in Israel. This group was composed of politicians, scholars, and military leaders who engaged in discussions about the relevance of the biblical narrative to contemporary Israeli society. Havrelock illustrates how the study group aimed to cultivate a sense of unity and purpose, drawing on the biblical narrative to inspire a collective national ethos that would transcend the differences among the various immigrant communities.
5. **Settler Ideology:** The author delves deeply into the ideologies of the settler movement, which has embraced the narrative of Joshua as a divine mandate for land acquisition. This perspective often frames the displacement of Palestinians as a necessary step in fulfilling a biblical prophecy. Havrelock critiques this mindset, arguing that it not only disregards historical injustices but also perpetuates a cycle of violence and oppression. The settlers' interpretation of Joshua emphasizes a sense of entitlement to the land, which is portrayed as divinely ordained, thereby justifying their actions against the Palestinian population.
6. **Critique of Nationalism:** Throughout the book, Havrelock engages with critiques from various scholars and writers, notably S. Yizhar, who challenge the moral implications of using Joshua as a model for contemporary state actions. Yizhar's works, such as "Khirbet Khizeh," highlight the ethical dilemmas faced by soldiers during the 1948 war and question the righteousness of the conquest narrative. His reflections serve as a poignant critique of the glorification of military might and the ethical costs of such narratives. Havrelock underscores how Yizhar's insights resonate with broader concerns about the dehumanization of the "other" and the moral responsibilities of those engaged in acts of violence.
7. **Canaanite Resistance:** In a thought-provoking exploration, the book also addresses the idea of Canaanite identity as a form of resistance against dominant Israeli narratives. Havrelock suggests that Palestinians can reclaim their historical and cultural heritage by connecting themselves to the ancient Canaanites. This reclamation serves not only as a means of asserting their rights but also as a counter-narrative to the prevailing Israeli discourse that seeks to erase their presence. The notion of a Canaanite identity challenges the binary oppositions

often constructed between Israelis and Palestinians, opening up avenues for dialogue and understanding.

8. **Conclusion:** Havrelock concludes by calling for a critical re-examination of the narratives surrounding Joshua and the Israeli occupation. She advocates for a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges the complexities of history, morality, and identity in the region. By interrogating the ways in which biblical texts have been wielded as instruments of power and justification for violence, the author urges readers to consider the implications of these narratives for contemporary Israeli society and the ongoing struggle for Palestinian rights. The book ultimately challenges the reader to reflect on the moral dimensions of national identity and the responsibilities that come with historical narratives.

Key Aspects of Havrelock's Critique of the Bible:

1. **Interpretative Framework:** Havrelock examines how the biblical narrative of conquest in the Book of Joshua has been appropriated to justify contemporary political actions, particularly the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This raises questions about the morality of using scriptural texts to legitimize violence and territorial claims.
2. **Ethical Dilemmas:** The book highlights the ethical dilemmas inherent in the conquest narrative, emphasizing the violent subjugation of Canaanite peoples. By drawing attention to these moral issues, Havrelock critiques the way biblical stories are often sanitized or selectively interpreted to support nationalist agendas.
3. **Contradictions in Nationalism:** Havrelock engages with critiques from scholars like S. Yizhar, who challenge the righteousness of using biblical narratives to justify state actions.⁴⁹ This engagement underscores the contradictions between the ethical teachings of Judaism and the actions taken in the name of those teachings.
4. **Cultural Reclamation:** The exploration of Canaanite identity as a form of resistance suggests a moral imperative to acknowledge and address historical injustices. This reclamation challenges the dominant narrative and invites a reconsideration of biblical texts in light of their impact on marginalized communities.
5. **Moral Responsibility:** By urging readers to reflect on the moral dimensions of national identity and the implications of biblical narratives, Havrelock calls for a more responsible and nuanced engagement with scripture that recognizes its potential to both inspire and justify oppression.

In summary, "*The Joshua Generation*" serves as a critical examination of the intersections between biblical interpretation, nationalism, and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the book does not outright reject the Bible, it critically examines its moral implications and the ways in which its narratives can be manipulated to serve particular political ends. This critique encourages a deeper reflection on the ethical responsibilities associated with interpreting and applying biblical texts in contemporary contexts.

Testimony #49: Trimm - The Destruction of the Canaanites (2022)

The Author: Charlie Trimm (PhD, Wheaton College) is Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He is the author of *Fighting for the King and the Gods: A Survey of Warfare in the Ancient Near East* (Society of Biblical Literature) and *"YHWH Fights for Them!": The Divine Warrior in the Exodus Narrative* (Gorgias).⁵⁰

The Book: *"The Destruction of the Canaanites: God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation."*⁵¹ The book addresses the ethical dilemmas posed by the Old Testament narratives of violence, particularly the destruction of the Canaanites. It explores various interpretations and responses to these narratives, aiming to foster a conversation about moral injury and understanding.

Key Themes:

1. Warfare in the Ancient Near East:

- **Reasons for War:** Trimm outlines various motivations for warfare in the ancient Near East, including self-defense, the defense of allies, and the desire to maintain order against chaos. He emphasizes that ancient societies often viewed chaos as a threat to social stability, prompting military action.
- **Historical Examples:** The text discusses significant historical figures, such as Ramses III, who fought against invading forces, and the Amarna letters, which illustrate the pleas for military assistance among Canaanite city-states.

2. Genocide:

- **Definition and Historical Context:** Trimm provides a definition of genocide, noting its modern connotations and the historical atrocities that qualify, such as the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. He categorizes genocides into colonial and internal types, exploring how these concepts relate to biblical accounts.
- **Impact on Modern Readers:** The author reflects on how the legacy of these historical genocides complicates the interpretation of biblical texts that describe similar acts of violence.

3. Canaanites:

- **Identity and Culture:** Trimm delves into the identity of the Canaanites, their cultural practices, and their historical significance. He notes that the term "Canaanite" encompasses various groups, complicating the narrative of their destruction.
- **Interactions with Israel:** The book discusses the complex relationships between the Israelites and Canaanites, including instances of cooperation and conflict, as well as the role of Canaanite religion and practices in shaping Israelite identity.

4. Reevaluating God:

- **The Nature of Divine Commands:** Trimm critiques the traditional view of God as wholly good and compassionate, suggesting that the violent commands attributed to YHWH challenge this characterization. He explores theological implications of a deity who commands destruction.
- **Historical Critiques:** The author references historical critiques of divine violence, including perspectives from philosophers and theologians who argue that such portrayals are inconsistent with a loving deity.

5. Reevaluating the Old Testament:

- **Historical Accuracy:** Trimm questions the historicity of the violent events described in the Old Testament, suggesting that these accounts may have been shaped by later political and theological agendas, particularly during the reign of King Josiah.
- **Literary Context:** He emphasizes the importance of understanding these texts within their literary and historical contexts, arguing that they should not be taken as straightforward historical accounts.

6. Reevaluating Interpretation:

- **Non-Literal Readings:** Trimm advocates for a non-literal interpretation of the texts, suggesting that they do not necessarily describe genocide in the modern sense. He explores alternative readings that emphasize the metaphorical or symbolic nature of the violence described.
- **Comparative Analysis:** The author compares these biblical narratives to other ancient Near Eastern texts, suggesting that the rhetoric of violence may serve different purposes than literal historical accounts.

7. Reevaluating Violence:

- **Justification of Actions:** Trimm argues that the mass killings described in the Old Testament should be understood within the framework of ancient warfare ethics, where such acts were seen as permissible for a specific historical moment.
- **Covenantal Context:** He discusses the covenantal relationship between Israel and YHWH, suggesting that the violence commanded against the Canaanites was a part of fulfilling divine promises to Israel.

Critique of Biblical Narratives:

1. **Violent Commands:** Trimm challenges the portrayal of God in the Old Testament as commanding acts of violence, questioning how these narratives align with contemporary understandings of morality and justice.
2. **Historical Context:** He argues that many biblical accounts may not reflect historical reality but rather serve specific theological or political purposes, suggesting that their moral authority is questionable.

Reevaluation of Theological Concepts:

3. **Nature of God:** The book critiques the traditional view of God as wholly good, positing that the violent commands attributed to God complicate this characterization and raise ethical concerns about divine morality.
4. **Interpretative Framework:** Trimm advocates for non-literal interpretations of violent texts, suggesting that traditional readings may perpetuate harmful understandings of God and morality.

Ethical Implications:

5. **Moral Injury:** By addressing the psychological and moral distress caused by these narratives, Trimm highlights the ethical implications of interpreting the Bible in ways that justify violence.
6. **Call for Dialogue:** The author encourages open discussions about these issues within faith communities, suggesting that grappling with difficult texts can lead to a deeper understanding of morality and ethics in a modern context.

In conclusion, while Charlie Trimm does not outright reject the Bible, his work serves as a significant critique of its teachings on violence and morality. He invites

readers to reconsider the ethical implications of divine violence as depicted in scripture and to engage with these narratives in a thoughtful and critical manner.

By encouraging a reevaluation of God's character, the historical context of biblical texts, and the interpretative frameworks used to understand them, Trimm challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about their faith. This critique ultimately seeks to promote a more compassionate and ethically responsible understanding of scripture, one that aligns with modern values of justice and human dignity.

Testimony #50: Felder - Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives (2023)

The Author: Cain Hope Felder (1943 –2019) was an American biblical scholar, serving as professor of New Testament language and literature and editor of The Journal of Religious Thought at the Howard University School of Divinity. He also served as chair of the Doctor of Philosophy program and immediate past chair of the Doctor of Ministry program.⁵²

The Book: “*Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives: On Use and Abuse of Sacred Scripture*.”⁵³ The book reveals the processes at work in both the New and Old Testaments that reflect ancient ambiguity about what we call race. Felder uncovers misuses of the biblical text (such as the so-called curse of Ham) in subsequent interpretation and shows how the Bible has been used to trivialize African contributions and demean and enslave Black people.

Summary of Key Points:

1. Race and Biblical Context

Felder examines the concept of race and ethnic identity within biblical narratives, highlighting that ancient authors did not possess the modern understanding of race that categorizes people primarily by skin color. Instead, racial attitudes in biblical times were influenced by cultural and geographical contexts, which were vastly different from the Eurocentric interpretations that emerged in later centuries. He emphasizes the need to differentiate between the biblical worldview and the subsequent historical developments that have shaped contemporary racial ideologies.

2. Sacralization and Secularization

The author introduces two critical processes that frame his analysis:

- **Sacralization:** This process involves the transformation of cultural and historical phenomena into theological truths that serve the interests of specific ethnic or racial groups. Felder argues that certain narratives in the Bible have been reinterpreted over time to justify the superiority of particular groups, often distorting the original meanings of the texts.
- **Secularization:** In contrast, secularization refers to the weakening or reinterpretation of religious concepts under the influence of sociopolitical

pressures. This shift can lead to the misapplication of biblical texts in ways that reinforce racial hierarchies and marginalize certain groups.

3. The Curse of Ham

Felder provides an in-depth analysis of the narrative found in Genesis 9:18-27, which has been historically misinterpreted to justify racism and the enslavement of African peoples. He clarifies that the curse pronounced by Noah is not directed at Ham but rather at his son Canaan. Felder discusses how later interpretations of this passage were manipulated by European theologians to create a racial hierarchy that deemed black people inferior. He emphasizes that these negative interpretations are not rooted in the original biblical text but are postbiblical constructs that reflect sociopolitical agendas.

4. Old Testament Genealogies

The genealogies presented in Genesis and 1 Chronicles are examined as theological constructs that illustrate the process of sacralization. Felder argues that these genealogies serve to elevate the Israelites above other nations, reflecting a particular ethnic identity that is framed as divinely favored. He critiques the tendency to view these genealogies as objective historical accounts, asserting that they are instead shaped by theological motives that prioritize the descendants of Shem and reinforce a sense of ethnic superiority.

5. Narrative of Miriam and Aaron

In Numbers 12, the narrative concerning Moses's marriage to a Cushite woman is analyzed for its implications regarding race and class. Felder points out that Miriam and Aaron's criticism of Moses reflects underlying racial prejudices, particularly regarding the identity of Moses's wife. God's punishment of Miriam, who becomes leprous and is described as "white as snow," serves to highlight the problematic nature of their attitudes. This narrative illustrates the complexities of race in the biblical context, where black identity was not inherently viewed negatively, but rather through the lens of social status and class dynamics.

6. Doctrine of Election

Felder discusses the doctrine of election as it pertains to Israel's identity as a chosen people. While the Old Testament presents Israel's special relationship with God, this idea raises questions about ethnic superiority and exclusivity. He notes that the explicit concept of election develops later in Israel's history, particularly during the Deuteronomistic period. Felder contrasts this with the New Testament's approach,

which shifts towards a more inclusive understanding of election, embracing Gentiles and emphasizing faith over ethnic identity.

7. Racial Ambiguities in the New Testament

Felder argues that the New Testament reflects racial ambiguities, particularly in how it addresses darker races. He points out that early Christian authors often marginalized these groups, focusing instead on the Greco-Roman worldview. The author critiques the tendency of modern interpreters to overlook the contributions of African peoples in the biblical narrative. He highlights instances, such as the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, where racial identity is obscured, suggesting that the narrative may unintentionally downplay the significance of African involvement in early Christianity.

8. Modern Implications

Felder calls for a renewed commitment to pluralism and racial justice in biblical interpretation. He challenges the Eurocentric biases that have historically marginalized people of color and urges contemporary readers to engage with the biblical text in a way that acknowledges its relevance to all racial groups. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the integrity of diverse racial identities within the context of salvation history.

Key Aspects of Felder's Critique of the Bible:

1. **Historical Misinterpretations:** Felder examines how certain biblical passages, especially those related to race, have been misinterpreted to justify racism and oppression. He critiques the ways in which these interpretations have been used to support harmful ideologies.
2. **Cultural Context:** The book emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural and historical context of biblical texts. Felder argues that many modern interpretations fail to consider the original meanings and intentions of the authors, leading to distortions that perpetuate racial hierarchies.
3. **Sacralization and Secularization:** Felder critiques the processes of sacralization and secularization, highlighting how theological concepts have been manipulated to serve specific ethnic or political interests. This critique extends to how religious beliefs can contribute to societal issues like racism and ethnocentrism.
4. **Ethnic Identity and Exclusivity:** The author challenges the notion of ethnic superiority that can arise from interpretations of the doctrine of election and

genealogies in the Bible. He argues for a more inclusive understanding of God's relationship with humanity that transcends ethnic boundaries.

5. **Call for Reinterpretation:** Felder advocates for a reevaluation of biblical texts to foster a more inclusive and equitable approach to biblical scholarship. He encourages readers to engage with the Bible in a way that acknowledges and honors the diverse racial identities within the faith community.

Overall, Felder's work serves as a critical examination of how race and racism have been interpreted through biblical narratives. He advocates for a more nuanced understanding of these texts that consider their historical and cultural contexts, while also addressing the ongoing implications of these interpretations in contemporary society. By doing so, Felder aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable approach to biblical scholarship that honors the contributions and experiences of marginalized communities.

Conclusion

As we reach the end of “*Another 25 Testimonies Against the Bible: #26 to #50*,” it is essential to reflect on the journey we have undertaken through the diverse and critical perspectives presented in this volume. Each testimony has illuminated the complexities, contradictions, and challenges inherent in the biblical texts, urging us to confront the historical and contemporary implications of our interpretations.

The voices of the scholars featured here resonate with urgency, especially in light of the ongoing conflicts and injustices that shape our world today. The narratives we have explored reveal how the Bible has been employed both as a source of spiritual guidance and as a tool for oppression. This duality compels us to reconsider the ways in which sacred texts can be interpreted and misinterpreted, often leading to profound consequences for individuals and communities.

Throughout this collection, we have encountered critical examinations of violence, colonialism, gender, and race within the biblical narrative. Scholars like Phyllis Trible have challenged us to acknowledge the patriarchal structures embedded in scripture, highlighting how these narratives have historically marginalized women and reinforced gender inequalities. Similarly, scholars like Lori Rowlett and Barbara Tuchman have confronted the violent rhetoric that has justified conquest and domination, particularly in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Likewise, Michael Prior’s exploration of colonialism’s moral implications challenges us to recognize how biblical texts have been appropriated to justify the oppression of indigenous peoples, raising critical ethical questions about the legacy of such interpretations.

The testimonies also highlight the ethical dilemmas posed by divine violence and the portrayal of God in the Old Testament. Scholars like John Dominic Crossan and Eric Seibert critically analyze instances of divine violence, questioning how these portrayals align with the teachings of love and compassion exemplified by Jesus. This juxtaposition raises essential questions about the nature of divine authority and the moral responsibilities of believers in interpreting these texts. Crossan’s assertion that understanding the Bible requires acknowledging its historical context encourages a more nuanced approach, challenging traditional views that equate biblical authority with moral infallibility.

This examination is particularly poignant in the context of the ongoing war against the Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied Territories, where biblical narratives have been invoked to justify territorial claims and acts of violence. Rachel Havrelock’s examination of the Book of Joshua illustrates how the biblical narrative of conquest has been appropriated to justify contemporary political actions, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In *"The Great Evil,"* Chris Mato Nunpa meticulously details the systematic genocide of Native Americans, highlighting the historical parallels with contemporary conflicts, particularly the ongoing war against the Palestinians in Gaza. Both scenarios illustrate the devastating impacts of colonialism, where dominant powers employ military force and ideological justifications to dispossess and dehumanize Indigenous populations. The narratives of displacement, cultural erasure, and violence resonate deeply in both contexts, as marginalized communities strive to resist oppression while facing overwhelming military might. Just as the biblical interpretations were manipulated to justify the atrocities against Native Americans, similar religious and political rhetoric is often wielded to rationalize the ongoing suffering of Palestinians. This comparison invites a critical examination of how historical injustices echo in modern conflicts, emphasizing the urgent need for solidarity and recognition of the rights and humanity of all oppressed peoples.

As we witness the suffering and displacement of countless individuals in these regions, it becomes imperative that we critically engage with the narratives that have been used to justify such actions. This book serves as a call to action, urging readers to reflect on the ethical implications of scriptural interpretation and to advocate for justice and compassion in our communities.

In this light, I would like to draw attention to my own work, *"Qur'an's Message of Equality and Justice."*⁵⁴ This book explores similar themes of racism and bigotry, providing a comprehensive analysis of how the Qur'an addresses these issues. By examining the definitions, historical contexts, and the role of religion in perpetuating or combating these ideologies, it becomes clear that the Qur'an offers profound insights into the human condition and provides comprehensive solutions to humanity's problems.

The Qur'an emphasizes the unity of humanity, equality before Allah, and the merit based on righteousness, echoing the calls for justice found in the testimonies we have explored. It asserts that all individuals, regardless of their background, are entitled to dignity and respect. This message aligns closely with the critical reflections on racism and bigotry presented in this volume, reinforcing the idea that both texts advocate for a more just and equitable society.

Moreover, the Qur'an's holistic approach to combating racism and bigotry—through political, social, legal, economic, educational, and cultural systems—provides a framework for understanding how to implement these principles in contemporary society. Just as the scholars in this volume have urged us to reconsider the implications of biblical narratives, my work encourages readers to engage with the Qur'an as a source of guidance in addressing systemic injustices.

By incorporating the insights from the Qur'an, we can cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the ethical responsibilities that come with faith. The testimonies presented here, along with the teachings from *"Qur'an's Message of Equality and Justice,"* serve as a reminder that interpretation is an act of responsibility—one that can either perpetuate harm or promote understanding and healing.

Furthermore, the contemporary manifestations of racism and bigotry—such as Islamophobia, xenophobia, and hate crimes—demand that we engage with religious texts in ways that promote understanding and solidarity. Just as the testimonies in this collection challenge readers to confront the uncomfortable truths of the Bible, my work invites a similar critical engagement with the Qur'an, advocating for a holistic approach to combating injustice in all its forms.

Ultimately, the critical testimonies presented here invite readers to engage with the Bible in a way that promotes healing, justice, and understanding. They challenge us to reflect on our interpretations and the potential for scripture to inspire positive social change. As we navigate the complexities of faith in a diverse and often divided world, the lessons gleaned from these testimonies encourage us to foster a faith that is both reflective and responsive to the challenges of our time. By doing so, we can contribute to a more just and equitable society, one that honors the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their background.

As we reflect on the insights gained from this volume, we must also recognize the importance of community in this endeavor. Engaging with these testimonies can spark conversations that extend beyond the pages of this book, fostering spaces where individuals can share their experiences and perspectives. These dialogues can serve as a catalyst for change, encouraging us to confront the injustices that persist in our societies and to envision a future rooted in equity and justice.

Thank you for joining us on this critical journey through the complexities of the biblical text. May the insights gleaned from this volume, alongside the teachings of the Qur'an, inspire you to engage with scripture in ways that promote justice, equity, and a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. Together, let us continue to question, reflect, and strive for a world that embodies the ideals we hold dear.

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